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A SILVER KEY
& TO A GOLDEN PALACE

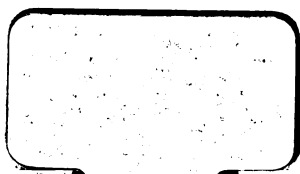


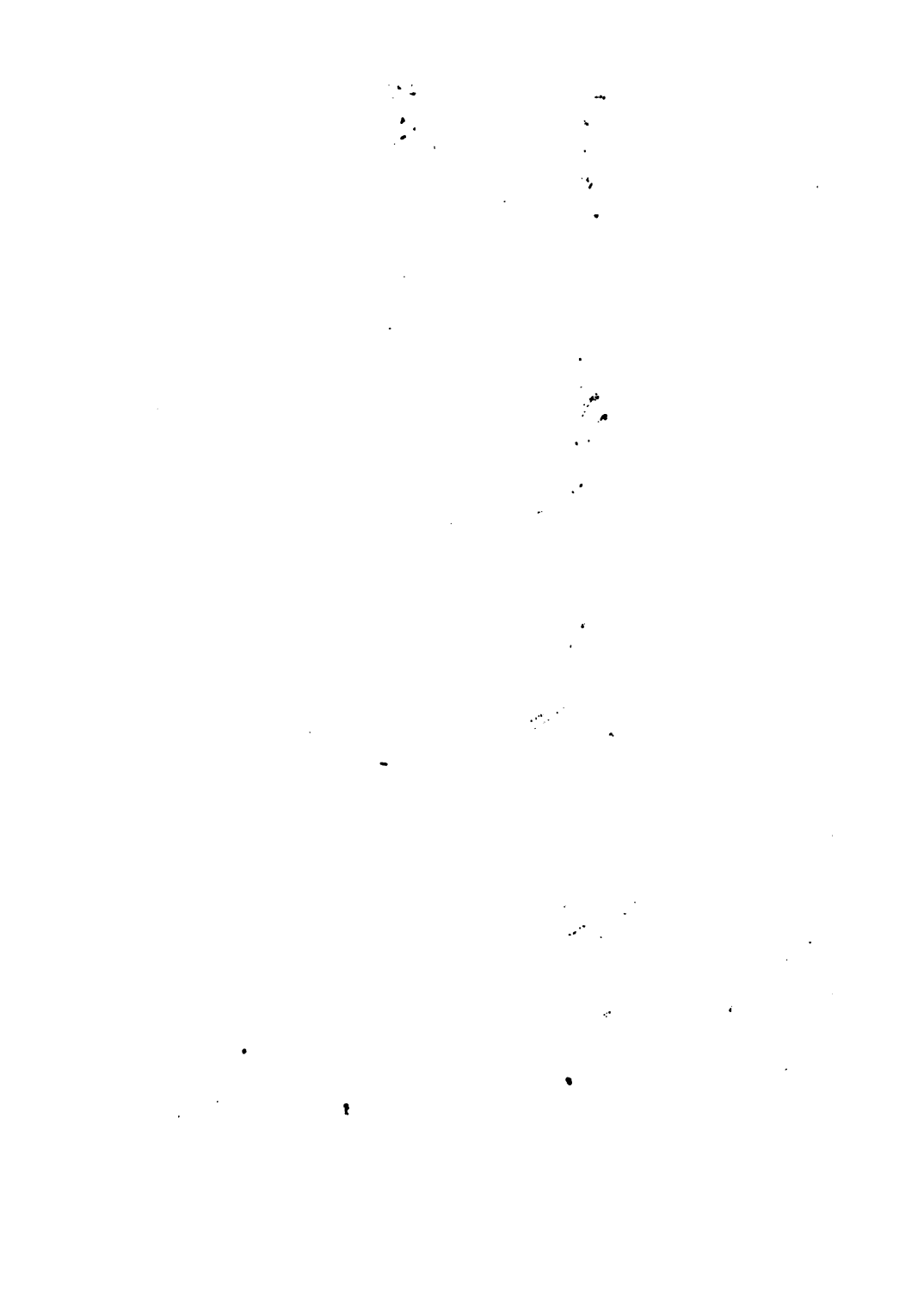
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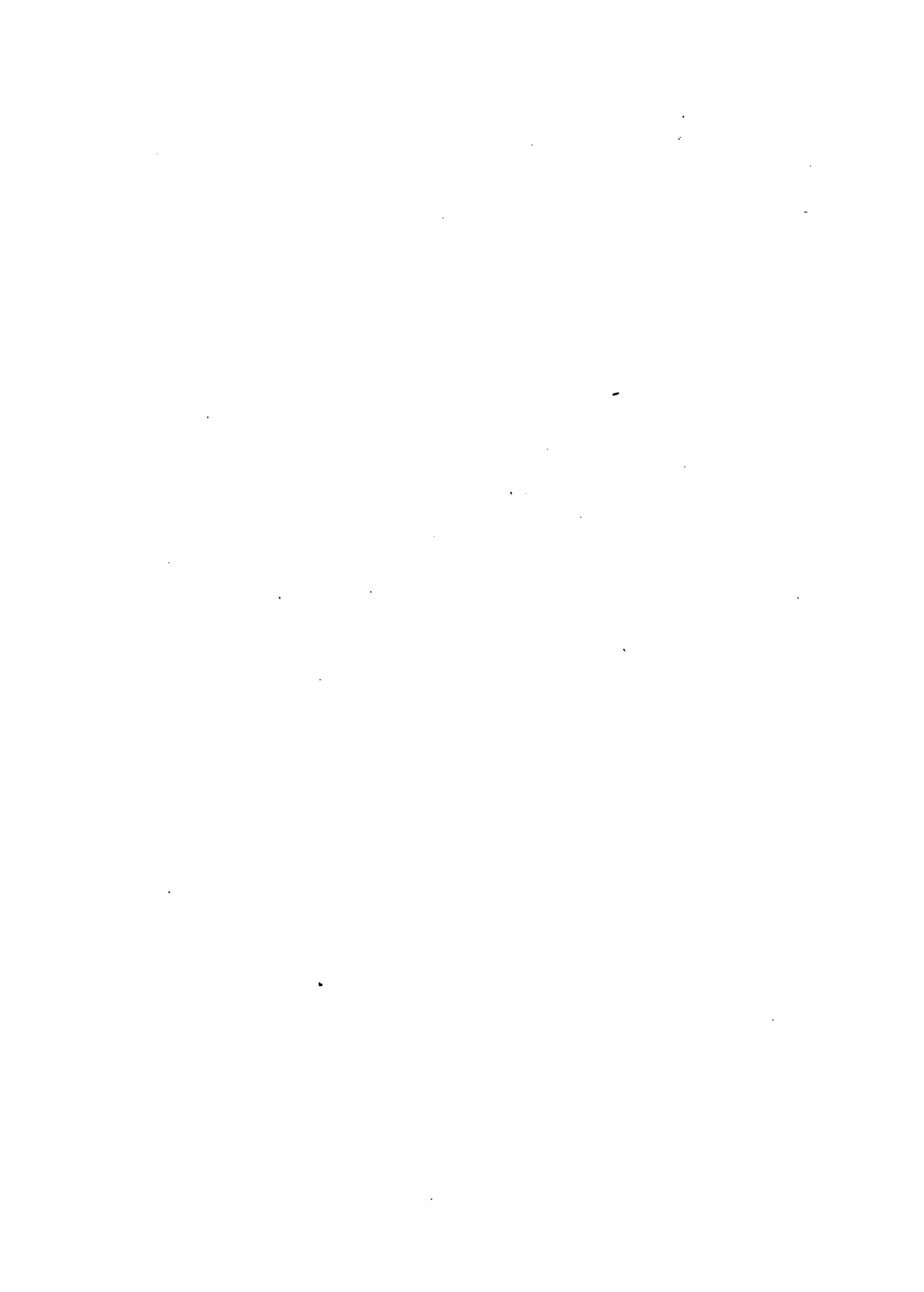




A SILVER KEY

TO

A GOLDEN PALACE





To face page 127.

"Lily saw with surprise that the Moe was trotting along, evidently on its own responsibility, down hill as fast as ever its long legs could carry it."

A GOLDEN PALACE

7. July

ALAN D. LEE



REG. ROUTE 1 AND 500 S

6 MAY 1961

NEW YORK: 1974. 100 P. \$1.95. ISBN 0-14-001111-1.

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To face page 127.

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A GOLDEN PALACE

A (2000)

ALTON BISHOP



LONDON

GEORGE ROUTLEDGE AND SONS

ROADWAY, FLEET STREET

NEW YORK 40, BROAD STREET

Ed.

25. 7. 1901

A SILVER KEY
TO
A GOLDEN PALACE

A Medley

BY
ALTON LESLIE



LONDON
GEORGE ROUTLEDGE AND SONS
BROADWAY, LUDGATE HILL
NEW YORK: 416 BROOME STREET
1881

251. g. 152.
L.

Monthly Magazines for the Household.

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THIS BOOK.

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A SILVER KEY TO A GOLDEN PALACE.

CHAPTER I.

WHERE ARE YOU GOING, MY PRETTY MAID?

"I have a garden of my own,
But so with roses overgrown,
And lilies, that you would it guess
To be a little wilderness."

ANDREW MARVELL.

"GOOD-BYE, father, I wish I were going with you!" said the owner of a doleful little face, looking up at a tall soldier-like figure by her side. Major Nevil smiled, as drawing on a pair of dog-skin gloves preparatory to taking his departure, he answered his little daughter's piteous appeal.

"You can't come to-day, darling, your mother and I are going to be very busy in town. My little bird must make herself as happy as she can without us, and be ready to welcome us home again this evening, about dinner-time. Take good care

of yourself, and mind you don't get into more mischief than you can help while we are away." His blue eyes twinkled as he said this, as though he had shrewd suspicions that the injunction would be totally unheeded by the child to whom it was addressed. "See, dear, mother has been waiting some time for me, I really must be off." So saying, he stroked the sunny little head, kissed the pretty mouth held up to him, and passing through the white gate by which he stood, took his place beside his wife in the low pony carriage before the door. Mrs. Nevil kissed her hand lovingly to her little daughter for a last good-bye; then with the oft-repeated words, "Remember, Puck, be a good child while we are away," Major Nevil gathered up the reins, touched the little brown pony lightly with the whip, and it trotted off gaily on its way to the railway-station.

"Harold, I never leave that child at home but I fear something will happen before we return!" ejaculated Mrs. Nevil, as she and her husband drove away from the gate. "She is so wild and thoughtless; she keeps me in a continual state of

anxiety about her when I am away from her, even if it is only for an hour or two."

"Oh, nonsense, dear," answered Major Nevil, the amused smile once more visible about his eyes. "Lily will be all right, never you fear. The old she-dragon at home won't let her have more than enough of her own way, poor child. Don't fidget yourself about Puck. She certainly has a curious faculty for getting into mischief; but, upon my word, I never saw a more sensible child, or one better able to take care of herself. So cheer up—she won't come to much harm."

And now what has become of the little figure left all by herself at the gate, gazing disconsolately down the long country-road after the retreating carriage? Poor Lily, it was certainly a great trial to see Nelly the pony trotting away without her. She who loved nothing so much as to spend a day in London, seeing the shops, and the parks, and the hundred-and-one things there that were so pleasant to her. At last, when the carriage quite disappeared from view in a cloud of summer dust, she swung the white gate to, and walked slowly up

the well-rolled path bordered with shrubs, back to the house.

"Come in this minute, Miss Lily; don't be standing out there in the broiling sun, without even a hat on or nothing!" were the words that greeted her as she came within full view of the nursery windows. There was nurse calling her to order as usual!

Nothing was ever right in nurse's eyes, thought Lily with a sigh. It was either "Come here at once, Miss Lily;" or "Go there, Miss Lily," when she would so very much rather have done exactly as she liked. "How very tiresome nurse always was to be sure!" However, the independent young lady did not seem to mind the cross tones much to-day, for she had something else to think about.

She marched into the house, up the broad oak staircase into the nursery, in obedience to the call, a great deal more meekly than usual. A minute later and her elbows were resting on the sill of the open window, and she was busy turning over in her little mind the very *best* way of spending this

152 nice long whole holiday. "Poor Archie, I shall have to leave him at home, and we did settle to have such fun on our very next holiday. Poor boy!" And Lily grew sad for a moment over the thoughts of her little brother and playfellow having to lie sick in bed on such a lovely summer day. He was her constant companion and fellow-culprit in all her pranks; but a midnight escapade, in which she had been as usual the leader, had laid him up with a bad cough, and nurse insisted that at present Lily should see as little of the invalid as possible, for fear of exciting the little fellow. There was no help for it, she must make her plans without him.

How very blue the sky was overhead, and the geraniums were so scarlet, they quite dazzled her eyes as she looked at them blazing away in the sunshine! There was a happy bird up there flying fast across the bright blue sky;—where was it bound for, with its wings outspread?

"How I wish I were a bird, or that butterfly there!" thought Lily, as she watched a splendid brown and crimson fellow flutter from flower to

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flower, and then settle on the Gloire de Dijon rose, that was looking in at her through the window. "How very nice it would be, just to be somebody else for a *little* while—just for a few hours!" sighed she.

She was in one of her restless roving moods to-day, in which she was wont to deplore that the race of Fairy Godmothers was extinct, and to mourn over the fact that Wishing Carpets, Wonderful Lamps, and Magic Caps, only existed in the far-off days of Once upon a time. What was the use of wishing?—besides, time was going on, and all the flowers and the birds and the insects, were saying—"Come out in the sunshine, Lily. Come out!—come out!" just as clearly as ever they could. She really wouldn't stay indoors any longer on such a glorious day.

"Nurse!—nurse! I want my hat, please!" Not waiting for it to be placed on her curly head, off she darted to the door; but nurse was too quick for her, and though she tried to elude the dreaded grasp, she was caught, and an unwilling prisoner she was forced to remain, till it was nurse's good

will and pleasure to release her. There was never any use in struggling on these occasions, as she knew by experience, for nurse always kept such a very tight hold.

"*Will* you keep quiet, Miss Lily? If you can, that's to say! Your sash is untied, and your hat must be put on properly. I never did see such a fidget, never! Now then, Miss, you may go; but remember, please, while your papa and mamma are away, I'll not have you go beyond the garden on any account. Amuse yourself quietly there, like a young lady, till your dinner-time, and don't go rampaging round and waking poor Master Archibald."

Nurse Collett was considerably flurried by her chase after her troublesome young lady, and smoothed her cap, and the stiff ringlets on either side of her heated face, with signs of offended dignity. "As sure as my name's Sarah Collett, that child will get into some mischief, because mistress is up in town. I've got Master Archibald safe from harm anyway—that's a comfort!" and with this solace nurse was obliged to content herself.

In the mean time, freed from the detaining hand, Lily sped joyfully away down the garden paths, between the rows of tall white lilies, less like their namesake than were the blooming summer roses, peeping here and there in sweet abundance amongst the stiffer and more stately flowers. Roses of every colour and shade bloomed there, shedding their delicious perfume far and wide. The child slackened her pace as soon as she was well beyond Nurse Collett's call, and stood leaning against the trunk of a spreading tree to rest. It was a nice, shady spot, and while she stands there with her hands full of ox-eyed daisies that she had stooped to pick on the way, I will tell you something about the little maid.

From her very earliest years, adventure in any shape was delightful to Lily. Mrs. Nevil always maintained that her artist brother, Frank, who spent a great deal of his spare time at his sister's pretty house at Sydenham, was to blame for Lily's misdeeds; that it was he who incited her to her madcap pranks. She often begged him not to fill the child's head with more rubbish than it accumu-



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“Lily sped joyfully away down the garden paths, between the rows of tall white lilies.”

lated there naturally ; but somehow or other, perhaps because of a natural sympathy between the two ; perhaps because he was a good story-teller, and she was an insatiable listener, the uncle and niece spent many a happy hour together. Sometimes he would repeat to her old tales and legends such as she loved to hear, or else, after a visit to some theatre in town, he would describe the play, generally one by our great playwright, Shakspeare, till Lily longed to see it too. You see she loved the heroes and heroines of England's great poet, for in the winter evenings Major Nevil often read out portions from his works ; and Lily, curled up on a stool at his feet, her fair head resting against his knee, listened and dreamed over what she heard. She stored it all up in her little head, gathering knowledge from every source, as a bee collects honey from the flowers. In summer she liked to hide herself away in some favourite corner of the garden, as often as not in an old hollow tree, and drink deep draughts of fairy lore. As she read, she fancied herself by turns the ill-fated princess, kept prisoner in some cruel

wizard's enchanted palace; and then the gallant knight triumphant over every ill, who rescued the lovely damsel from the magic spells that bound her.

When reading of some wild escape she felt as though she had planned it with the brave hero of the tale, and breathlessly she followed it step by step, her eyes glistening, her heart beating, till at last she would clap her hands fervently together, rejoicing with the captive in his safety. The heroes of these romances were always quite real to Lily, living people whom she both knew and loved. A day in her uncle's studio was a rare treat to her. Perched on some old carved chair or chest, she would become absorbed in dreamy contemplation of the quaintly imagined pictures about her, weaving many fancies as she gazed. Sometimes mad-cap moods were on her, and then many were the daring feats "Puck," as her father called her, accomplished, to the dismay of mother and nurse.

Just now, on the hot summer day of which we speak, Lily seems quiet enough, with the gnats buzzing about her in the still air, laden with the sweet

fragrance of new-mown hay and June roses. Her pretty grey eyes are bent in the direction of the road, of which she can just catch a peep through a gap in the privet hedge. I wouldn't be too sure that no mischief is brewing in that curly head of hers, though she seems, as I say, quiet enough.

Suddenly away go the ox-eyed daisies among their little pink-tipped brothers and sisters in the grass, and off marches Lily with her head erect and a firm step to the white gate by which we saw her standing a short while since. Why do her eyes dance with so bright a light, I wonder, and why does so glad a smile illumine the little face, sober enough a moment ago? Now—see—the gate is opened by a pair of eager little hands—the soft nest is deserted, the fledgling is off—off into the wide world alone!

CHAPTER II.

LILY'S ADVENTURE WITH THE BASKET-MAKER.

"Oh! who would keep a little bird confined
When cowslip-bells are nodding in the wind,
When every hedge as with 'Good-morrow' rings,
And, heard from wood to wood, the blackbird sings?
Oh! who would keep a little bird confined
In his cold wiry prison?—Let him fly,
And hear him sing 'How sweet is liberty!'"

W. L. BOWLES.



HAT could have induced Lily to leave the pretty garden and its shady trees to hurry along the dusty road as she was now doing, perfectly oblivious of nurse's last command? There was nothing to be seen in this same road,

save a large yellow cart, which was wending its way along, past the beeches; in fact, as Lily emerged from the white gate, it was well up the road, and had reached the red-brick wall which bordered the buttercup meadow. It seemed to fill the entire road, as it swayed from side to side, covered with basket-work wares of every description. Wicker-chairs, babies' cradles, baskets, small and big, of every shape and kind, hung round it, almost hiding the yellow walls from view.

"Hi!" called Lily, as she ran along the road after it. "Hi! Mr. Basket-man!" shouted the little voice once more, as a man some way in front, with a tall feather-brush in his hand, did not seem to hear her first call. Still the man, who was in yellow gaiters and wore a rusty velveteen waistcoat, took no notice of her, and poor Lily, quite out of breath with her long run, was obliged to rest a moment before returning to the charge. As she slackened her speed, a little brown hand was laid upon her arm, as though to gain her attention, and a little brown face looked into hers. Lily stared at this apparition, as if the earth had opened at her

feet and some kobold from its depths had suddenly appeared before her.

"Wos you callin' father?" said the new-comer, in quite a mortal's tone of voice. "I was pickin' these in the hedge; see, ain't they pretty?" and the brown hand, full of ragged-robin, was thrust up into Lily's face.

"Yes, they are very pretty, and I like picking them too," said Lily; "but who are you? and where do you come from?" and she looked wonderingly at the thinly-clad, almost ragged little girl beside her.

"I'm Nancy, and there's father a-head with the cart. Wasn't you a-callin' him just now? See, he's stopped now, and he's lookin' for me, is father," and the lips parted over a row of very white teeth, which gleamed from out the thin, tanned face.

"Come along then, Nancy, we will go to him. Give me your hand," said Lily. And off the strange couple ran happily enough.

The "Basket-man," as Lily called him, opened his eyes wide with astonishment, as the two children came up to him, and tilting his hat to one side he

scratched his head. Perhaps he hoped by so doing to come to some sort of understanding "what was up with Nancy."

"Why, Nancy, lass, who have ye got there, eh? What, my little lady!—you want to have a drive along with us in our yellow cart, do you? Well, I never!"

Gazing at the large vehicle before her, genuine admiration was visible in Lily's eyes. As she looked by turns at the quaint little railing which ran round it, and at the flight of red-painted wooden steps leading to the door, and at the little windows, with their tiny white muslin curtains, an old desire of hers to be an inmate of just such a charming house, even for a short while, returned with redoubled force.

"Nancy, do you really *live* in there? Do let me go inside it for a very little while. I should so love to travel with you. Will you take me?"

What a happy little girl Nancy must be, she thought, to live always in so delightful a house! Never staying long in one place, wandering on, always seeing new things and new people; she

envied her from the very bottom of her heart. She longed with an indescribable longing for Nancy's father to say "Yes," to her request that she might join them in their wanderings. The man's bronzed face expanded into a broad grin, as he nodded an answer to the pleading little lady.

"Jo!—Jo Spraddle, I say!" called a sharp loud voice from the depths of the cart. "Whatever are you loitering here for, I should like to know? It's downright lazy of you, when we ought to be nigh the town by this time; why, it's arter twelve!" A woman's head, with a red cotton handkerchief surmounting it, now appeared at the door, and an inquiring glance was cast at the group in the road, by the owner of a pair of very dark eyes. "What does that child want here?" continued she in the same harsh tone as before, giving Lily at the same time the benefit of a prolonged stare.

"Peg," answered the Basket-man, good-naturedly smiling, and motioning Lily up the steps of his conveyance. "Peg, there's never no accountin' for tastes; here's a little lass, no bigger nor our Nancy, wants to go along with us for a bit; she can go

if she has a mind to ; — but you'll have to find your own way back, Missy, for we are bound for Lunnon."

Up the steps mounted Lily—proud and happy as a queen—here was an adventure which well pleased her roving mind. What if they were going to London !—it was a novel way indeed of getting there, and no other was likely to be half so delightful. She mentally determined to go every bit of the way into town with her new friends. Her thoughts were interrupted at this point, for she stumbled and almost fell just as she was entering the cart. What was it she was so very nearly tripping over ?—a bundle—with two beady black eyes that peeped up at her, and besides these, a pair of very healthy red cheeks ! She saw at last that a youthful member of the Spraddle family was evidently amusing himself by rolling along the floor ; he was roughly pounced upon by the woman called Peg, and taken to another corner of the cart, and Lily was at liberty to enter the basket-maker's home. Her eyes were soon dim with the clouds of thick smoke which filled every cranny of

the curious room she now found herself in. Down her throat, into her eyes and nose, the smoke travelled, and she could hardly see an inch before her. This was not the most pleasant welcome; but, not easily discouraged, she felt sure she' would find this house on wheels quite as nice as her fancy had painted it, if "only the smoke would clear off, and she didn't fall over any more babies!" In the mean time she was taken with a long and violent fit of coughing.

"Ha!—ha!" laughed Peg, in a loud disagreeable way, "I expect young ladies don't like smoky chimneys—no more do poor folk—but they have to put up with them all the same sometimes. Set the door open, Nancy, and don't stand gaping there!"

Poor Lily managed to gasp out, "I do—on't mi—ind much, tha—a—nk you," when she was almost thrown off her balance, and was only saved from a tumble by catching hold of little Nancy. "Oh, dear! Does your house always bump like this?"

"Lay hold on the rail there, Missy," said Nancy.

"It always jerks, the cart does, when it first starts ; we shall be right enough presently."

Reassured, Lily seated herself on a rough bench against the wall, and as the stifling smoke cleared off a little, she was able to see more of her surroundings. The outside of the cart was gay enough—new coats of scarlet and yellow paint, whenever it showed signs of needing them, kept its exterior at any rate pleasant to the eye—but as Lily looked round her and saw the dinginess of the interior, she began to think that after all perhaps her own pretty home might be nicer to live in always! What she could see of the wall showed they had been once yellow ; but what with the discolouring effects of smoke and time, they were now a dull dirty brown. It was little enough she could see of them, by reason of the many things that hung round them. Dresses, shawls, bonnets, were there in untidy confusion. She hardly thought it was the place for herrings among these articles of dress, but there they were, hanging from the same peg as Mrs. Spraddle's best bonnet, with its scarlet roses and green strings. Just above her head dangled a new pair of men's

boots, and across the blackened roof were strung several rows of onions ; it was altogether the very funniest place she had ever seen. Broken cups, cracked basins, abounded on rickety-looking shelves against the wall ; and if the glass over the fireplace had ever done duty as a mirror, it must have presented a very different appearance to what it did now. Lily wondered as she looked at it, if Peg could possibly see to arrange her glossy jet locks and gay head-dress in that starred and ill-favoured looking-glass.

The smoke still emerged in great puffs every now and then from the chimney, almost hiding Peg, who was bending over a large stew-pot on the fire. Its contents were simmering away, and as she stirred them with an iron ladle, a savoury smell issued, and made Lily feel quite hungry.

“ So this is the family dinner being cooked ! Do they always have it out of that big black pot, I wonder, and what does it taste like ? I shouldn't be surprised if it's Irish-stew, like we have at home ! ”

Lily would like to have asked some questions

about the Spraddles' dinner, being of an inquiring mind, but she was afraid it might seem a little rude; so she contented herself by slipping off her seat, and making her way silently to Peg's side. The latter was a tall large-made woman, with a high colour, and a strange fierce way of looking at her, which Lily did not at all like. As she looked from Nancy to Peg, and back again to Nancy, she tried to trace a likeness between them in vain. Poor little Nancy was so small and delicate-looking, and her eyes were so soft and kind, as they peered almost pleadingly at her through the tangled masses of her rough hair.

"Now then, Miss Curiosity, when you've quite finished staring you can say so!" said Peg, so suddenly, that her little visitor was quite startled, and turned very red. "You calls them company manners, no doubt; but I can tell you I was better worth staring at once than a doll like you, with all your laces and ribbons, whatever you may think! Fine feathers make fine birds, young lady! There, go along, and don't be worrying me, or maybe it'll be the worse for you."

Lily was utterly unable to understand this extraordinary speech of Mrs. Spraddle, but the tone and the rude gesture accompanying it, she fully comprehended, and she looked with a questioning and bewildered glance at Nancy. Annoyed, Peg certainly seemed ; but Lily wondered why her wrath should be vented upon her unoffending self. It never struck her for an instant that it was she who had provoked the impatient stamp of the foot and the angry scowl that darkened Peg's handsome features. Shrinking from again meeting that hard gaze, Lily slipped away from her corner by the fire, to where Nancy stood beckoning her ; and as she went she said to herself, " Nancy's mother is a very disagreeable person—the most disagreeable person I have ever seen."

" Come away, Missy, over here," whispered her little friend, drawing her to a seat near the door of the cart, in the corner the farthest removed from Peg. " Don't you let her talk to you if she's cross ; she's awful, mother is, when she's in her tantrums. There's no stopping her ; father's afeared of her too, then. She throws anything at us she can lay

her hands on. I'd have run away long ago," and here Nancy's voice was lowered still more, "only I know she'd have me again, and then wouldn't I catch it! Why she'd kill me! And then there's father—he's good to me, he is. I shouldn't like to leave father."

"Have done chattering, and call Jo in to his dinner, you idle baggage," broke in Peg's harsh voice, and Lily soon saw the cheery face of Jo Spraddle appear at the door of the cart. He stooped as he entered, and, with a kindly nod at Lily, seated himself on a wooden stool at her side. She felt quite happy now he was present to protect her in case of any fresh ebullition of temper from Peg.

"My eye—ain't it hot in here this broiling day?" ejaculated Mr. Spraddle, loosening the crimson knot about his swarthy neck, and wiping his brow. "Well, and how do you like my coach, Missy, now you've seen it? it ain't much to look at, is it?"

"There you go, as usual," interrupted his wife with heightened colour. "Perhaps you'd prefer to

live in a gentlerfolk's parlour every day of your life, and sit on gold chairs, and eat plum-pudding every day. Is there anything else you'd like? Perhaps your Miss piece-of-curiosity there would ask you home with her, and give you a ride in her carriage and pair." .

At this fresh outburst Lily felt sorely tempted to laugh outright. The very thought of Mr. Spraddle seated on a gold chair munching away at plum-pudding, as he was doing now at a huge piece of bread and onion, was more than she could think of gravely, and she was glad to hide her smiles behind Nancy's shoulder. Not in any degree moved by his wife's sarcastic speech, honest Jo continued to slice away at his bread with his clasp-knife, and Lily peeped at him in childish wonder. "Was all that going into his mouth at once?" Jo's mouth certainly stretched very wide from side to side when he laughed, but no one would have guessed its capacity who had not, like Lily, seen the meal before him disappear with startling rapidity. A big yellow handkerchief was spread upon his knees, and he now received from Nancy a

large bowl filled from the steaming cauldron on the fire.

"Now then, Peg," called he, again breaking the silence, "fill up this here," and he lifted down from off a shelf a large basin printed in brilliant colours. Some of the hot stew was ladled into it ungraciously enough, and he handed it to Lily, saying as he did so, "See, here's a pretty cup for a pretty little maid. The dinner ain't what you're accustomed to, I doubt, but maybe you'll like it as a change. You're safe to be hungry, now, ain't you? We ain't a going to starve you while you bide with us, are we, Nancy, lass?"

Nancy, with her hand on her father's shoulder, nodded approvingly at him, and smiled with pleasure as she saw Lily was nothing loth to join them in their meal. Lily, if the truth must be told, was really curious to taste some of the dinner Mrs. Spraddle had been so busy cooking ever since she had been with them, and gladly accepted the food now offered her. Very good indeed she found it, though it wasn't quite like Irish stew after all, and she ate away at it with an iron spoon and a two-

pronged fork, as though no better provision had ever been made for her. What did she care for Peg's black looks as long as good-natured Jo and little Nancy were by her side? She chatted away with her two companions merrily enough, her ringing laugh sounding cheerily through the cart, and Sam, the boy who helped Mr. Spraddle in the sale of his wares, wondered to hear such sounds as he walked by the side of the old white horse.

They rattled on, the yellow cart and its inmates, on along the dusty roads dry and parched with a June sun, and Sam began to think himself forgotten, and to long for a "bite of sum'at" too, till out of the cart came Jo at last, to Sam's extreme satisfaction, for now he knew his turn was coming, and he would be called to finish the remains of the "vittals." But as Mr. Spraddle was in the act of descending the steps, Peg's voice was heard once more; this time in louder tones, and with a tight hold on Jo's arm, she followed him down, while she poured forth a stream of loud angry words, words which to Lily's ear were perfectly unintelligible. Fast and faster they came, accompanied with wild

gestures, her head-dress had become disarranged in the excitement of the moment, and her black hair streamed behind her, giving her a most wild and uncouth appearance. Her face was distorted with passion, and Sam, as he heard them approaching, gave a low whistle, and ducked behind the horse's head, and slunk round to the other side of the cart. Down the steps went Jo, and after him went his angry wife, and Sam, with a proper care for his own safety in the brawl which he saw was imminent, dodged behind the cart, especially as he had caught sight of a certain ladle in Peg's muscular grasp, with which he may have had closer acquaintance formerly than he quite liked.

In the mean time Lily in a corner of the cart surveyed the scene which was being enacted before her with no very pleasant feelings ; every minute she expected Peg to turn upon her, and vent some of her rage upon the subject of the quarrel. The child had little doubt it was she who was provoking Peg's wrath, for though she could not follow the exact meaning of the words spoken, she saw the fierce looks cast at her by the enraged woman, and

had reason to fear the uncontrollable passion of her gestures. Poor Jo did not attempt to argue with his wife, but seemed to wish to get her away from Lily if possible ; and heartily glad was the latter when the fury of the storm raged outside instead of inside the cart. Anxious to know the fate of the good-tempered basket-man, she peeped through one of the tiny windows, and met Jo's broad gaze fixed upon her. He was relieved for that instant from frantic Peg, for she had caught sight of Sam behind the cart, and, apostrophising him in no measured terms, she was then aiming at him a stinging blow with the iron ladle. In that second Jo managed to convey a signal to his little daughter, who, like Lily, was glued to one of the panes of glass.

Quick as thought the little girl dragged Lily to the door, and mid a stream of tears, begged her to run for her life, "Or mother will catch you! Father says it, and so you must go ; don't wait a minute, Missy, but just run up that road there as hard as you can go. I don't think she'll see you. She's almost mad with rage agen you, she is. Oh, do

go quick ; she'd kill you, I do think, Missy, if she got you. Oh—do run—run ! ”

Half pushing her down the steps Nancy urged Lily's departure ; she hardly liked to leave her little friend to bear the brunt of Peg's anger, but seeing the real agony that Nancy was in, for fear lest she might lose her chance of escape, Lily peeped round the entrance of the cart. Peg's back was turned to her. Lucky moment ! Off she flew, as hard as her little legs could carry her. Was it fancy, or did she hear, as she turned the corner pointed out to her by Nancy, a loud cry ? Surely those were howls that followed ; had Peg discovered her flight, and was she then after her ? Were those long legs gaining on her, and would those brawny arms be inflicting the same punishment on her that she had so recently threatened poor Sam with ?

Lily seemed to hear the dreaded footsteps sounding nearer and nearer, and closer and closer to her, and she almost felt the hot breath of furious Peg upon her cheek, and the descending blow of the ladle on her defenceless head. Should she look round and make quite sure ?

Out of breath—exhausted with her long run, her little legs refused to go any further, and she sank down on a mile-stone by the roadside ; she could not help it ; if she were to be flayed alive no further could she go. She turned her head—no person was in sight at all ! No pursuing fury was after her. Fear had lent wings to her feet, and she was well beyond sight of even the blue smoke from the tall chimney of the yellow cart. Saved ! and more thankful than she could well say, Lily drew a profound sigh of gratitude for her providential escape from the infuriated gipsy.

The more she thought of the woman's fierce ways, dark skin, and wild black hair and eyes, the more convinced she felt that Peg was one of that mysterious race which had always possessed a strange fascination for her. There was no mistake about it, she had really fallen into the hands of a live gipsy ! This was a regular adventure, and now that she was safe, she began to feel quite heroic. It was quite exciting to think what might have happened to her had she remained longer in the cart. Would she have been stolen and have

had all her pretty curls cut off? and been dressed in a ragged cotton gown like little Nancy? Would they have minded *very* much at home if she had never come home again? Would nurse have cried? and here Lily burst into a merry laugh, for she thought nurse would look so very funny crying. Well, she was safe away from Peg, but her nice drive to London was at an end; and Jo had promised to drive her all the way to Chelsea, where Uncle Frank lived; and wouldn't her kind, good uncle have wondered to see her walk into his studio, when he thought she was miles away! It was too tiresome that her capital plan was all spoilt by Peg's horrid temper.

At length, rested after her long run, Lily rose from her seat, and new thoughts forced themselves upon her. In which direction should she turn her roving steps? The Beeches lay behind her, the way home was back through the shady lane up which she had just run. But the yellow cart might be still standing at the corner of the road, and valiant as Lily felt herself to be, she did not care somehow to run any risk of meeting Mrs. Spraddle

again. No, the only thing that seemed at all possible for her to do, was to walk straight on and see where the lane led to, and straight on accordingly she went, between the green hedges covered with trailing branches of the wild rose. How the pink blossoms smiled at her as she passed them by! At any rate she liked to think so—and the child smiled back at them in return as she went on her way. Sydenham did not boast of many wild flowers, but the wild roses were faithful to the hedges, and came back year after year, where the plasterers and bricklayers let them grow undisturbed that is to say. Many nooks where primroses and violets once covered the ground of old, were now the site of "modern residences within three minutes' walk of the Palace," at least that is what a white board with big staring black letters said to Lily as she came to the end of the shady lane, and faced a row of new brick houses with very clean faces indeed.

CHAPTER III.

A SILVER KEY TO A GOLDEN PALACE.

“The solemn palms were ranged
Above, unwoo’d of summer wind :
A sudden splendour from behind
Flush’d all the leaves with rich gold-green.

* * * * *
In marvel whence that glory came
Upon me, as in sleep I sank
In cool soft turf upon the bank,
Entrancèd with that place and time,
So worthy of the golden prime
Of good Haroun Alraschid.”

—TENNYSON.

“WITHIN three minutes’ walk of the Palace.”
Yes, the white board with the black letters was quite right as to the distance. In almost less time, Lily’s quick little steps had reached the fairy-like building, the great Crystal Palace, its walls and roof of glass blazing away like gold in the mid-day sun. Here was an opportunity not to be neglected !

For long it had been the dear wish of Lily's adventurous heart to wander through the mystic aisles and lofty galleries of this giant palace at her own sweet will. Many had been the longing glances she had cast towards it; she had always been half afraid that a rough wind might blow away the delicate structure some night, like a spider's web, and that when the great sun rose again she would see the Palace no more. But here it was, safe and sound to-day, at any rate, and away she marched to the entrance with a smiling determination about the sweet curves of her little mouth.

How was it that in making out her plans for the day's amusement a visit to this El Dorado had not entered into her calculations? She could not understand why she had been so stupid as not to think of it; but as it happened, things had turned out splendidly. First she had travelled in a real gipsy's cart, and secondly she had been driven within reach of her darling Palace, which she had only been inside once or twice, and then only under strict *surveillance*. Now she intended thoroughly

to enjoy herself, alone and uncontrolled. Old Davis, the postman, passed by as she was entering the building, and nodded at her. It had been an old wish of hers to mount beside him some day on his scarlet postcart, and to be driven off somewhere, she did not much mind where, so long as she could see new people and fresh sights. A very roving little maid was Lily. But now a dearer wish of her heart was about to be fulfilled, and she was going to pass through the gate of her Golden Palace.

“Well, Miss, where’s your sixpence? You don’t suppose you are going to get in here without paying, do you?”

Lily looked ruefully up at the big man who spoke in such gruff tones. A black beard was almost all she saw under a gold-laced hat. Poor Lily! was her expected pleasure to come to an end as suddenly as this? Such a common-place idea as paying for her entrance had never crossed her mind. The little hand felt somewhat woefully in the pocket of the dress she wore, to see if perchance any coin lurked in the corner. Yes, lucky chance!

Uncle Frank's bright new silver shilling was there, and triumphantly she put it into the big man's hand. He turned it over unconcernedly enough, tossed her a dull old sixpence in return, and then she found herself in the palace of her dreams.

With a long-drawn sigh of satisfaction, Lily paused to think in which direction she would first turn her steps. Then past the stalls of toys she went. What a wealth met her view! Giving them but a hurried glance, for realms of greater delight were awaiting her further on, she entered the broad and lofty nave of the noble building, and a tiny insignificant little being she felt herself in this great place. The glass roof stretched so far above her head, and it was so long, so very long from end to end, this Crystal Palace. She looked with awe at the organ perched above the orchestra seats that rose tier above tier in empty grandeur. Silent, the patient organ was waiting till its master's hand should bid it roll forth its melodious secrets to the ear of man.

A large theatre faced the organ, but the green

curtain was down, and Lily thought it looked exceedingly dull, and longed for it to rise. But no, there it remained, and as it was not likely to do anything else for the wishing, the little maid went to seek amusement elsewhere.

Crowds of people, all taken up with their own pleasures, strolled backwards and forwards, chattering and laughing as they went, unheeding one little figure in their midst—all, save a lady, who held a little girl of Lily's age by the hand. She paused on her way, and stooping, kindly asked the child if she "were looking for some one," and if she "could help her to find her friends?" Lily shook her curly head, and casting aside her momentary feeling of loneliness, ran merrily down the broad nave, away to the cool marble basins full of water and water-lilies, edged with a belt of bright flowers and ferns. Gold-fish darted about and dived in and out among the smooth leaves of the lilies, lazily flapping their fins after each little fresh exertion. They certainly managed to keep themselves cool down there in the water, and Lily envied them.

On she went, like a little blue butterfly, past the statues, too, that lined her way. Reverently she gazed at the Shepherd King,—the “Sweet Singer of Israel,” among the acacias. She smiled at her namesake Puck, in attitude of elfish glee, and turned with saddened, wondering eye from Niobe all tears in her leafy bower. Many birds flew through the crystal aisles, resting their busy wings a while on the foliage of the blue gum-trees, which reached almost to the roof. Then they took wing again, and strove to find an exit from their prison, to soar once more under the free blue vault of heaven. From side to side of the vast building Lily flitted, and as she wandered through all the strange foreign courts, she loved to people them with other than the prosaic crowds that jostled her as they passed.

It was with a deep delight she wandered on, in another world entirely from them. Aladdin’s far-famed palace, she was sure, was not half so nice as this one. Woven in among her thoughts of it were all the stories she had read of magician’s palaces and fairy buildings on enchanted ground. As though to carry out her ideas, she saw before her

a little marble table with a Bath-bun upon it and a bottle of iced lemonade ; was there anything she would have liked better ! There the refreshment stood, and gladly she seated herself to partake of it, and a waiter standing near, nodded at her in a friendly manner as she did so. She had reached, before she was aware of it, the refreshment stall at the top of the building, and gladly she availed herself of the opportunity which presented itself, although it was no magic wand which had conjured up the little round table and its nice contents before her. She had enjoyed her lunch with the Spraddle family, but whatever the quality had been, the quantity of the meal was not what she was accustomed to, and Lily rather missed her dinner at two o'clock.

The big clock above her said half-past two. She paid her remaining sixpence to the waiter, who was hurrying about with a table-napkin under his arm, and then her wanderings began once more. She stood among the richly-painted knights lying in effigy ; peaceful they looked with folded hands and closed-eyelids. What scenes of bloody

warfare they must have gone through before they won their present rest ! What tales of " days long since gone by," they could tell — those armed knights, but still and grave they lay on their sculptured tombs ; and thoughtfully Lily left them to enter the cool marble court of the Alhambra. The red, azure, and gold arabesqued walls of the inner part almost dazzled her with their brilliancy. How strangely beautiful it all was. A fountain ought to have played from the ugly mouths of the marble lions in the centre, and Lily would have liked the shrubs surrounding it to have been in flower. She would fain have seen Spanish donnas in lace mantillas walk through the court with picturesque cavaliers at their side, " but no such luck ! " thought Lily as she contemplated discontentedly the nineteenth century visitors around her.

With the least bit of a sigh she marched away from the Moorish Palace, gorgeous with colour, away through its low arches, into the heated atmosphere of India. Within a stone's throw of each other, Egypt and Spain, India and Pompeii, showed her its wonders by turns. Truly this was a deli-

cious place, this palace of hers. Worthy to rank with any other in the world! Too tired to go further, too tired even to visit the monkeys and the working bees as she had wished to, Lily sank down upon a grassy bank, overshadowed with lofty palms. Bananas and plantains waved above her, while the cries of gay-plumaged birds sounded on every side. What with the heat and all the excitement she had gone through within the last few hours she very soon fell fast asleep, her long dark



lashes resting upon her soft flushed cheek. A pretty picture she made, with the huge ferns as a

background, the sun peeping down upon her between the broad leaves of a spreading palm.

Rest, weary one ! The little feet must ache after all their journeyings, and the little brain be weary with so much novelty of sight and sound. Time passed, and still Lily slept on peacefully and soundly under the shadow of the palms.* * *

* * * * *

CHAPTER IV.

THE COMICAL TURK AND THE ROYAL BELL-
RINKERS.

“Lady-bird ! lady-bird ! fly away home,
The field-mouse is gone to her nest ;
The daisies have shut up their sleepy red eyes,
And the bees and the birds are at rest.

“Lady-bird ! lady-bird ! fly away home,
The fairy-bells tinkle afar ;
Make haste, or they'll catch you, and harness you fast
With a cobweb to Oberon's car.”

CAROLINE BOWLES.

WHAT made Lily suddenly turn restlessly in her soft bower, rub her eyes to chase away the last remnant of slumber that still hung about her eyelids, and then spring to her feet ? Instead of the brilliant sunlight which she had shut her eyes upon, flecking the ground with the shadow of the palms and filling every corner with brightness and warmth,

lo! Night had spread her sable mantle over the earth, and all was dark and still. It was true the pale face of the moon looked down upon her through the glass roof, and one little star and then another twinkled away at her, but how different everything looked to what it had done before she went to sleep! Lily rubbed away at her eyes again and again to see if indeed she were wide awake. Yes, there could be no doubt about the matter; she had slept on till all the people had left the Palace. The attendants had not seen her hidden among the palms and ferns, and she was a prisoner in the large dark empty Crystal Palace. She, the only human being in all that vast abode. As Lily stood there, the whole horror of the thought gradually stealing over her, she heard a great clock somewhere strike the hour. Eerie was the sound in the deathly silence of the night, as one by one the sharp strokes rang out. One—two—three—four—five—six—seven—eight—nine—ten—eleven—TWELVE! Twelve distinct clear strokes! What! Had her sleep lasted all that time? Her heart beat fast as she thought what a terrible thing had

befallen her. Oh, what was she to do? There was no use her asking this question, for she knew no one was there to answer it, and with her grey eyes full of tears she stood motionless, afraid to stir, and not knowing in the least what her next step was to be.

But what sound was that which broke upon the stillness? She seemed to hear some rolling musical tones in the distance. In wonderment she turned her face in the direction whence they came, and then distinctly she heard the organ pealing out its grand full tones. As the sound struck her ear she saw a light apparently in the centre of the building. First one appeared in the darkness, and then others followed, and down one side of the building and up the other ran a long line of lights, making gay and brilliant all that was dark and gloomy a moment before. What a pleasant sight this was! Lily's spirits rose with the occasion, and, listening to the strains of music, she recognised the familiar tune of "Girls and boys, come out to play," the air running through many variations with marked distinctness.

"Come, come, we must obey orders. Don't you hear the word of command? Ha, ha!" chuckled out a kind enough voice beside her.

Lily started on hearing herself thus addressed, and turning saw a stranger standing by her side. Bowing low, he touched his forehead with his hand in Oriental fashion. A curious figure he was, certainly! No hair was visible under the crimson turban he wore twisted about his head. A large flowered satin garment covered the greater part of his body, below which peeped out loose red silk trousers, and yellow pointed slippers. How fierce his pointed beard and moustache looked! But his twinkling eyes were full of fun, and were bent mildly on her, and Lily liked his polite manners and pleasant comical smile.

"I dare say you wonder who I am, talking away so coolly to a young lady without being introduced? but I know your papa, Miss Lily, very well, and many an hour we have spent together. I was on the silent system then though! It's only once every year I get the chance of wagging my old tongue, so I always make the most of my oppor-

tunity. I must keep so quiet all the three hundred and sixty-four days of my imprisonment that I declare my legs are quite cramped. They don't like being crossed as they always are, any more than you do."

The talkative Turk, for such Lily took him to be, first stretched out one leg and then the other in so lively a manner that she was quite startled. But she tried to hide her feelings out of politeness, and said with a smile, "Well, Mr.—Mr.——"

"Automaton—that's my name, but I'm usually called 'Tommy,' for short. I like it best. You can call me Tommy if you like ; it's less stiff, and I'm so stiff during the year that I'm very glad of anything that helps me to unbend a little. Ha, ha ! Besides, what a mouthful the other would be for you, just think ! You had better stick to Tommy, it's shorter and just as sweet."

"What a very odd man this was ! Where did he spring from ?" wondered Lily. "Do you often come to the Palace in the evening, Mr. Tommy ?" She felt it would be hardly polite to say "Tommy," without the "Mr.," and he might be offended if she

called him by his long name as he did not seem to like it.

“ Well, yes, I may say I am here very constantly, Miss Lily. I have an engagement of a business character, which keeps me here pretty regularly, and only allows me my evening out once a year. There’s a hard-worked man for you! Perhaps you won’t believe me when I go on to say that my work is all play; I always make it a rule to be above board though. So now read my riddle, if you can.”

As Lily thought over this last speech of the stranger, and wondered whether really he expected her to answer it or no, he went on to say—

“ Come, we mustn’t stand talking here when there is so much to be done in a short space of time. If you will allow me, I shall be proud to show you all the sights of this wonderful Palace, as I believe you have never seen it before under the present circumstances? You need not fear nothing from the lions I am about to show you, they are warranted perfectly harmless and are prevented from showing their teeth, or otherwise annoying

visitors while *I* am here." The gallant gentleman then tapped himself significantly on the breast, but he produced in so doing so hollow a sound that Lily heartily hoped he wouldn't repeat the gesture. He must have noticed her uneasiness, for he volunteered laughing, "That reminds you possibly of the woodpecker of history, tapping on the hollow beech tree? Eh? Well, I have rather a hollow chest, but a hard head and an iron constitution," and he drew himself up with a comical air of pride, and twisted his long moustaches. "Now if you are not afraid of an old Turk for your companion, we'll begin our tour of the Palace."

Lily gratefully accepted her amusing friend's offer; she felt as if she had known him all her life, and with her hand in his walked in the direction of the music. What a sight met her eyes as she and her companion emerged from the Indian Court into the lofty nave. A blaze of light surrounded them, and the perfume of innumerable flowers filled the air. Twining in luxuriance round the stately pillars and graceful arches were the loveliest blossoms Lily had ever seen. Could the earth produce

anything so beautiful as the huge crimson passion flowers, jessamines, tuberoses, and stephanotis, that surrounded her on all sides ? The myrtle, acacia, and camphor-trees also bore blossoms of surpassing fragrance ; and gay humming-birds, Java sparrows, and orange, blue, and scarlet-winged songsters, flew in wild delight about this Paradise of beauty.

“ Who brought all these lovely flowers here, Mr. Tommy ? ”

“ Nobody at all,” answered he. “ The electric light has forced them to come out whether they would or no. It’s only heat and a little encouragement they want, and they get that when all these are lighted,” and he pointed to the dazzling lights above.

Before Lily could say what an excellent idea this seemed to be of utilising the light, Tommy broke out into the following song, keeping time to the organ, which still rolled out its grand tones :—

“ Kings and Queens, come down this way !
The moon doth shine as bright as day,
Leave your slumbers and leave your sleep
Till the dawn o’er the east doth creep.

Come with your hoops and farthingales all,
Come with a will to the royal ball—
Down the staircase and into the hall,
Plenty of room for one and all !”

Then, as if in answer to his call, came a stream of the strangest people possible and flocked past the place where Lily and Tommy stood.

In pleased surprise Lily stepped aside to give them more room to pass. Alas! they were gone all too soon.

“ Oh, Mr. Tommy, who were those lovely ladies and those gallant-looking knights? I should so much like to follow them and see where they are going. They passed so very very quickly, didn't they ?”

“ Come along then,” said her amiable guide. “ This way,” and he descended a flight of broad stairs to their right, and motioned his small companion to do the same. They then entered a large lofty hall hung with huge mirrors reaching to the ground. Thousands of wax candles adorned the crimson satin walls and were reflected in all their brilliancy in the glassy surface of the polished oaken floor. There sparkled the jewelled robes

Lily had seen before, and there gleamed the white arms of the lovely ladies she had admired so much.

"See, Miss Lily, when you go to Turkey you must do as the Turks do, and when you come to Princes you must do as Princes do."

Lily thought Mr. Tommy's speech rather involved, but said nothing. He knelt before her and proceeded to buckle her on a tiny pair of silver skates on wheels which fitted her exactly, and putting on another pair on his own funny feet he took her by the hand, and they glided easily and pleasantly up the large hall together. A red cord divided them from the distinguished throng there assembled. Haughty dames in rich brocade and quaint headgear curtseyed in stiff state to armed knights and powdered cavaliers. Gold crowns rested upon most of the noble brows present, and the ladies' veiled heads were adorned by gem-starred coronets. Jewels flashed in such rich profusion that Lily's eyes quite ached. It was indeed a gorgeous sight this royal ball, and as the kings and queens, for such they were, went through their stately minuets and courtly dances, Lily wished

that her dancing-master, Mr. D'Egville, had taught her these instead of the stupid Quadrilles and Lancers it had been her lot to learn. What a marvellous gown was that worn by a queenly form that now was performing in dignified solitude a "solemne daunce," how stiffly it stood round her as slowly she sank with the sound of the music and then as slowly rose again! Embroidered with dragons and grotesque devices it glittered brightly in the light, for emeralds, rubies, pearls, and diamonds were thickly sewn upon it with golden thread. A high ruff rose from her shoulders above her crowned head. "She must have had wonderful starch," thought Lily, as she gazed at the erection, "to keep it so stiff and upright."

Amused as she was at the *pas seul*, performed by the handsome queen, so gravely, Lily looked beyond her at a kingly figure, who seemed to shrink from the scene of pleasure around him. He held a small black book in his hand, and his thin grave face contrasted strangely with the gay looks of his companions. Queen Bess, for it was she who was dancing away with such stately right

good will, beckoned him to join her in the dance, but he shook his flaxen locks, and, holding more tightly his book within his grasp, dropped his eyes upon the floor. As he slowly passed her, Lily saw that it was an illuminated missal he was studying, and she thought this mediæval-looking monarch might have stepped out from one of its pages, so ancient was his costume. His belt, which he wore over a short tunic, was studded with large gems, and his legs were crossed and recrossed with leathern thongs. His scarlet mantle and ermine tippet proved his rank; and a whisper seemed to be wafted to Lily's ears as he went by—

“Edward the Confessor! Don't waste your time inspecting that ancient person—fitter for the cloister than the throne. Because he idled away his time when he should have attended to his subjects, don't you follow his example. Plenty of subjects here worthy of your attention, Miss Lily!”

“Subjects!” Lily thought they were all sovereigns, but not liking to contradict the Turk, for it was he who had spoken, she said nothing. She

noticed now for the first time that all the dancers wore skates with silver bells attached to them, which sounded sweetly through the ball-room as they moved. These rang in cadence, and many pretty airs were heard as the busy feet moved here and there. This was all the music necessary for the dancers, and better Lily had never heard.

"The royal bell-rinkers," explained Tommy, "never perform out of the Palace! They do it very well, don't they, particularly as they have no time given them to practice in?"

"How much nicer to play tunes like that, than to have to strum away at finger exercise on the piano," thought Lily with a sigh.

"But then," as Tommy remarked as though in answer to her thought—"you'd find it rather trying to the poor feet if you had to do it often."

A sweet lullaby sounded now in Lily's ears, and softly and gently two figures glided past her to the sound of the plaintive melody. A young and graceful queen in gown of ivory satin cut square upon her neck, waved a feathered fan to and fro to cool her heated brow; a row of soft dark curls

rested there and framed her happy countenance. Merrily she looked up into her companion's face, and he stayed his steps, and looked tenderly down into her laughing deep-fringed eyes. His hair of a sunny brown was parted on his high brow and fell waving to his shoulders. His moustache and pointed beard were of the same colour. Laying aside the long blue velvet cloak he wore, he put his arm round his queen, as though to shield her from a coming foe. A large point-lace collar and a blue ribbon about his neck with a carved onyx pendant from it were thus made visible.

Reverently Lily gazed at the ill-fated monarch she knew so well.

Just at this moment, a burly figure in a black-felt hat, grey riding coat and high boots, came skating through the crowd of royal personages at a most rapid pace, scattering them on all sides as he rushed on intent only on his own pleasure and amusement. When they saw him coming, all moved aside hurriedly, as if in dislike to him.

It so happened that the stately monarch and his pretty queen, whom Lily had been watching



" Oliver Cromwell went to a ball—
Oliver Cromwell had a great fall."

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with so much interest, were on his line of march.

The king was stooping over his young wife, smoothing the hair upon her brow, and murmuring, in gentle tones—

“Mary—remember!”

A sweet smile flitted over his pale face as he spoke, and Lily felt the sadder, none the brighter for that smile. She strained her ear to catch any further words that might fall from his lips, but just then the rough travel-stained stranger jostled against the royal pair, lost his balance in so doing, and measured his length upon the ground.

How shamefaced and how poor a thing he looked, stretched there upon the floor! No one seemed to pity him, he had been so discourteous to the whole assembly.

“Oliver Cromwell went to a ball—
Oliver Cromwell had a great fall,
And all the kings’ consorts and all the kings then,
Wouldn’t pull Oliver Cromwell up again,”

growled Tommy. “Serve him right! Let him lie there. I’m awfully glad for one.”

"So am I," cried Lily with flaming cheeks and angry eyes; "how *dared* he touch the king?"

The fallen general had lost his hat in his sudden collapse, and his blunt features and weather-beaten face were now exposed to view. He pulled at his linen collar disordered by his fall, and a sullen look was on his face.

One only among the line of kings stretched out a white jewelled hand to help him rise, and to Lily's surprise she saw that it was King Charles.

"Ah! he shrinks from touching that hand," said Lily. "See, he is getting up alone; how he is rubbing his elbows!"

"He isn't by any means a general favourite there, or a favourite General, if you like it better," said Tommy. "They call him an interloper, and so he is. What business has he to stand up on the carved screen there among them all, as if he were one of them? That's where they all come from—from the screen by Sawyer's refreshment stall."

Lily listened with a great deal of interest, and Tommy continued—

"Why, bless you, they like to come and dance

here a bit, after being stuck up there like mummies all the year round. You see I can move my head and my arms every day, it's only my old legs that feel as if they must have a little exercise." So saying he raised his foot, and with the pointed toe of his yellow slipper he lifted up the hat which lay beside him on the ground. "Here's his hat ; serves him right for having kept it on his old round head in the presence of his betters ! We'll go for it."

With right good will he sent it spinning down the hall, where it rolled away into a dark corner and was hid from view. The group before them now moved away, and the figures were lost to view in the gay crowd.

A boy king then skated up to where Lily stood, and, doffing his velvet cap, in which was a long white feather fastened by a jewel of great price, offered her his hand.

Gladly accepting it, she stooped her little head under the red cord, and in a moment was among the royal skaters. Away they went, she and her young companion, merrily to the sound of the sweet silver bells, and before long she found herself

threading the mazy figures of an old country dance. Up the middle she went with a brave knight, who bore a blood-red cross upon his shield and on his snowy mantle. He smiled brightly at her as he motioned her to take his out-stretched hand.

Then she watched a hump-backed king skate by with an ungraceful limping gait, chuckling the while with unholy mirth, and Lily saw with a shudder that he followed close upon the heels of a pretty boy.

The latter nodded at Lily and smiled, and she liked his innocent and sweet expression. His fair hair was cut across his forehead and fell smoothly on either side of his little face.

"Oh, how could cruel Richard send him to the gloomy Tower?" cried Lily to the youthful king, who was at her side again; but laying his finger on his lips, he said—

"My sister," and pointed to where a queenly figure came.

A stern cold woman seemed this regal dame, she held a large crucifix in her grasp, and Lily turned to her companion with disgust upon her

face as she pointed to red stains upon the jewelled hands.

"Yes," said Tommy's voice close to her ear as this sovereign passed, tinkling her skates :

"That's the fine lady
Who rides the high horse,
With rings on her fingers and bells on her toes,
She must have martyrs wherever she goes !"

Now, my dear Miss Lily, if your partner will spare you, I wish to suggest a move. I do not suppose for one instant that you are bored, or that the kings and queens don't offer you plenty of amusement, but I am afraid I must check your little game here, for we are in danger of losing our night if we stay any longer. I like to act on the square, so I tell you plainly we must leave this festive scene."

Lily's young companion bowed and moved away, passing his thin white hand wearily across his brow ; and sadly enough she prepared to follow Mr. Tommy away from the fascinating ball-room. How many friends were there that she was grieved to leave ! As they remounted the stairs by which they came, she said emphatically—

"I am *quite* sure I shall like nothing else in the whole Palace half so much as the royal bell-ringers!"

Tommy smiled a funny little smile, as if he did not altogether agree with Lily's last speech, and said—

"We are bound now, if you are willing that is to say, upon a visit to a gentleman who has lodgings, for one night only, on the first floor. I saw a light in his window just now, so I quite hope to find him in and ready to receive visitors."

Lily thought this sounded rather dull, she wasn't at all fond of paying stiff calls and she heaved rather a heavy sigh, but Mr. Tommy looked so gleeful and his bright little eyes were twinkling so merrily that she thought some fun perhaps was in store for her after all. So taking his proffered hand, she marched off with him upon their new excursion, wondering whom she was about to see.

CHAPTER V.

A VISIT TO THE OLD GREY HOUSE.

“—By the golden lustre of thine eye,
And by thy brow’s most fair and ample span,
Thought’s glorious palace, framed for fancies high,
And by thy cheek thus passionately wan,
I know the signs of an immortal man.”

HOOD, *Midsummer Fairies*.

IN less time than I take to tell you of it, Lily and her companion found themselves by a long one-gabled grey house. Beams of black oak crossed and recrossed its exterior at different angles, and latticed windows of quaint shape were open to the air. As they approached the covered porch, walking under shelter of an over-hanging brown roof, they passed one of the windows which reflected in its diamond panes the light of a rushlight within, and Lily distinctly heard the sound of voices talking.

"Tap at the old black door, Miss Lily, and never mind if it creaks rather as you open it. It has lasted a good time, and it is likely to last as long again. Lift the latch and go straight in. I will stay outside, and let you pay your call alone. Come out when you've had enough of him."

Tommy pointed in the direction of the house, and then seated himself on a bench in the shelter of the ivy-covered porch. There Lily left him, with one leg crossed over the other enjoying a cigarette, looking very comfortable, and reading from some local paper the last news of Turkey. In answer to her timid knock on the oak door a voice bade her enter, and she crossed the threshold of the old grey house. A strange feeling of reverence and awe crept over her as she did so. It was a low room in which she found herself, with plastered walls and rough joists, huge beams ran across the ceiling, and a large old-fashioned fireplace, or open chimney, faced her, with a row of shining pewter plates ranged upon the high shelf above it. What spell was over this humble abode that made Lily feel as though she were treading some palace floor?

Wait and see, perhaps some day you too may know something of Lily's feelings as she stood within those narrow whitewashed walls, gazing before her in mute surprise. In a high-back carved chair near the chimney-piece sat the master of the house, and it was upon him, rather than upon the trim figure by his side, that the little visitor turned a pair of eager eyes. How familiar was the pleasant countenance that met her gaze! The auburn locks brushed back from off the wide brow, the soft hazel eyes with a strange light in them, bent affectionately upon her who was sitting on a wooden settle near him, these belonged to no stranger, but rather to an old familiar friend whom she had come to see. His dress was plain, but the slashed doublet and knee-breeches were after the fashion of long ago. His shoes were of leather, and his stockings of grey homespun. He sat with one shapely leg crossed over the other, and seemed as if he had been reading from a book that rested on his knee. In his hand he held some clove carnations, while a posy of the same together with some sweet herbs, whose perfume scented the entire

room, filled a blue Delft beau-pot by his side. Beside it on the oak table lay a sugar-loaf hat, and a platter as though some refreshment had been partaken of. The comely matron, with modest linen cap and well starched ruff (of smaller proportion than that worn by Queen Bess at the royal ball), looked the picture of an English housewife of the olden time. She seemed for the moment to have laid aside her household duties, but Lily fancied she was paying more attention to the bunch of keys, and the scissors and other articles of use at her girdle, than to the deep melodious voice of her young husband.

"Bid the little one welcome, Anne, and lead her here to me," said he of the pleasant countenance, looking up from his book and smiling at Lily, who stood near the door, afraid seemingly to enter further into the room. "Come hither, pretty one, and rest a while in our poor home. My Anne will make thee welcome, e'en though she looketh somewhat strange withal."

Lily was gazing rather askance at the handsome dame, who made no attempt to rise or greet her.



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"He drew her to his side and laid his hand, with its spotless linen wristband,
upon her curly head."

But her friend with the kind eyes now rose, and drawing his graceful form to its full height went forward to meet his visitor. Kissing her upon the forehead, he put the flowers which he had been holding into her hand, and led her kindly across the room.

"I love thee, little mistress, and thou lov'st me," he said in gentle tones. "Pr'ythee keep these gilly-v'lors; and here's some rosemary for remembrance."

Seating himself once more on his old oak chair, he drew her to his side and laid his hand, with its spotless linen wristband, upon her curly head.

For some minutes he remained buried in deep thought, and then resumed, as he looked earnestly into Lily's wondering grey eyes—

"Few there are among the many, who bestow more than a thought, a passing fleeting thought at best, on me, Mistress Lily. But methinks there dwells one now upon the earth, who, by the faithful love he bears me, interprets ably to the world some of the best thoughts of a poor playwright. A countryman of mine, he frets his hour upon the stage, and I would that he knew how one Will

Shakspeare holds him dear, and would fain tender him thanks for this same loving fealty. Thou lov'st plays and pictures, sweetheart, so I will wave my wand for thee to-night, and thou'lt see this player within my magic crystal."

"Nay, Will!" exclaimed his wife, laying her hand upon his sleeve, "the child would gambol with our kitten on the hearth yonder, an' you gave her the chance! Think you 'tis a pretty pastime for the babe to look within that piece of glass for thy friends the players? Magic crystal, forsooth! 'Tis an idling of the time, and nought else but an excuse to dream over thine own rhymes and silly pageants! Thou'lt not find me i' the vein 'for thy follies, for such they are I verily believe. Pr'ythee, have ever I seen ought therein? Nought but mine own reflection, however I might gaze and gaze!"

This outbreak on the part of his wife seemed to amuse Lily's friend, for turning to her smiling, he said—

"Hold thy peace, Anne, thou art a fool! 'Tis not to every one the crystal telleth its secrets," and lifting off the table near him what looked to Lily

like a round glass ball, he placed it in her hand. "Little one, look long and steadfastly therein, and many a dainty picture will rise before thee in its crystal depths. Breathe not upon it, but keep it pure and bright beneath thy gaze." As he spoke he waved his hand softly to and fro, between the fingers of which he held a feather. At first the crystal became somewhat misty, but the dimness cleared away, and as though beneath the wand of an enchanter a vivid moving scene pourtrayed itself before Lily's delighted eyes.

THE FIRST PICTURE IN THE CRYSTAL BALL.

The interior of an ancient castle, a lofty hall with rows of massive pillars supporting low broad arches, through which were seen dim aisles stretching away into the far distance. Leaning against one of the pillars stood a slight figure, reading from a red volume clasped in silver which he held in one hand, the other pointing to the lines, as he scanned the page before him with his dark piercing eye. Over his black silken tunic and trunk hose he wore a surcoat of the same mournful

hue edged with dark sable. No colour was visible in his dress, save the gold of the heavy chain about his neck. A dull steel belt set with cloudy gems attached his dagger at his side, where also hung a small silk satchel containing his handkerchief. A deep melancholy seemed to have cast a spell over the youth, and the traces of an overwhelming sorrow were visible in the pale and noble face. As Lily watched him the thoughtful student started, and looked where came an old courtier with a long white beard, clad in scarlet robes ; his dark eye lit up with scornful mirth and his sad mouth relaxed into a mocking smile, as he addressed some words to the new comer. Lily laughed, for she knew what the prince was saying, though she heard no words ; she recognised in the two figures before her—Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark, and The Lord Chancellor, Polonius. With gestures suggestive of pity for his lord, the bewildered shallow-pated old man retired from the scene, and two gay youths entered. The noble Dane tossed back the dark locks from off his brow, as though with the action he would fain have tossed from him a world of care, and throwing aside

the volume, hurried to greet them. With what surprise he welcomed first one and then the other as he met them with outstretched hand and kindly smile! Ah, false-hearted Rosencrantz and Guildenstern! They could not meet that loving welcome like honest men! They stood before their old friend with hanging heads and stammering tongues. He scanned their countenances with a rapid and inquiring glance, and their eyes fell beneath his piercing gaze. Then the sweet smile died away from the lips of the lonely prince, a sigh escaped from his over-burdened heart, and his features resumed their wonted melancholy. The sacred ties of fellowship were broken—all trust and confidence between Hamlet and his fellow-students were gone, and they were friends no more!

As Lily watched the figures in the magic ball with an eager interest impossible to describe, they faded gradually away, as did the hall, its arches, and the pillars, and nothing was to be seen but the reflection of her own bright little face. Then she knew she had seen the last of the dreamy youth who ever and anon had such fire in his eye as made

her wonder. She loved the gentle prince—pursued by fate—deceived on every side by those he loved—and she would like to have seen more of his tragic history in the crystal. But as she glanced up at her kind friend, she saw him waving his little wand once more ; and, lo ! again from out a momentary dimness, the following living picture grew into shape :—

THE SECOND PICTURE IN THE CRYSTAL BALL.

A wild desolate moor, patches of purple heather covered the rocky ground, a lurid sky streaked with black vengeful clouds, and a blood-red sun, which was sinking fast behind the murky hills. In front, three ghostly hags, who were pointing with immeasurably long and skinny fingers to some scattered boulders of yellow rock. Their rags hung close about their withered forms, their scant locks waved in the evening breeze, and the dying sun illumined their cavernous eyes and hollow cheeks. The same sun burnished with a ruddy glow the helmet of a highland chieftain wrapped in a grey mantle, with a spear upon his shoulder, who, accompanied by a warlike comrade, now strode into view.

With horrid unearthly gestures the withered crones greeted them one by one. Undismayed by the sight of them, but with his eyes bent on the ground, the soldier heard with troubled face and clouded brow the words they uttered. Words of ill-omen they must have been—else why had they so strange an influence upon him? When he first saw the weird sisters, he seemed to Lily to meet them with the air of a brave general, who, after a hard day's fighting had won a glorious victory. As this picture faded like the first had done, there stood the same soldier, but, ah! how different—standing aside in gloomy thought as though his forces had been put to the rout and his enemies left in possession of the field, and looking like some guilty wretch who harboured evil thoughts, while plotting vile deeds of blood and crime.

“Aye!—Pray, sweet one, for strength to conquer evil in whatsoever shape it may come—see how Macbeth was tempted—how he fell thou know'st!”

Lily heard these words whispered in her ear once more; then the mist overspread the crystal, with fresh delight she bent over it, and there appeared—

THE THIRD PICTURE IN THE BALL.

A panelled Council Chamber ; solemn men in black gowns and caps seated at a table. Raised above them under a canopy sat a venerable Senator in scarlet robes, with an ermine tippet round his shoulders, and a ducal crown upon his snowy locks. Before them stood a striking figure. A mantle of the richest crimson dye concealed his attire, except his hosen, which were of the same brilliant hue, and his black shoes edged round with gold. The hood of the mantle, pushed off from his thick jetty locks, disclosed a clear-cut noble face of dusky hue ; his hands of the same eastern tint grasped a sword sheathed in a crimson scabbard, which proclaimed him to be what he appeared, a man of war. Bending his head in salutation to the Council, he awaited in haughty silence for leave to speak. The noble on the dais motioned him to do so, and straightway he commenced a tale of vivid interest. His dark features lit up with love and hope as he spoke, and he accompanied his words with expressive gestures full of eastern grace. He won the sym-

pathy of his listeners, for they greeted his words with approving glances. With martial dignity he then left the presence of his judges, passing gay Venetian nobles in velvet doublets on the way, the stained glass windows casting coloured shades upon them and upon the marble floor the while. Leading a white-robed lady by the hand, the gallant Moor returned, and as he lifted the veil from off her fair face, he raised it to his lips. A lovely bride indeed! So thought the warrior, judging by the tender courtesy with which he led her before the Council, and the admiring steadfast glance he bent upon her. Her long dark silken lashes swept her cheek, where a faint colour mantled, like the delicate tint of a wild rose. Then she raised her eyes, and with a world of faithful love in their sweet pure depths she met the gaze of her lord. His cloak was now thrown back, and a crimson silk tabard worked in gold, and a glittering jewelled belt were exposed to view. As Lily looked upon the pair—Othello and the fair Desdemona—she thought she had never seen so perfect a picture. The warrior's gorgeous dress, and the dark beauty of his face,

made indeed a fitting contrast to the simple loveliness of the lady of his choice. She could have watched this magical picture for ever ; but just as this thought was passing through her mind, and she was hoping that her pleasure might be prolonged, all traces of the Venetian Council Chamber faded from her view, and Othello and his bride were gone !

“ What say’st thou to the pictures, fair Mistress Lily ? ” said the gentle poet. “ The thoughts are mine ; the form and colour by artists excellently well fitted for the work. The Globe in my day possessed not such paintings. Thou liv’st in happier days ! Now would’st thou have a fairy scene to gladden thy young eyes with elves and merry glee ? See where appeareth thy last vision, little mistress.”

Lily listened to her friend’s words, and gladly saw before her—

THE FOURTH PICTURE IN THE CRYSTAL BALL.

There was indeed a scene to feast her eyes upon !—a wood by moonlight ; but what a wood ! Surely

no earthly forest could show a sight so fair! There on a mossy bank, enthroned in flowery state, a fairy lady lay; a little queen, with wings as light as air. A lustrous star sparkled brightly above her brow, and her hair rippled in golden beauty to her feet. She lay cradled among flowers of every hue who paid their perfumed homage to their queen. Honeysuckle and clematis, roses and violets clustered round her as she slept. Lily was transported with delight and envied the little queen her scented couch and thymy pillow. A curious figure now appeared, and sat not far removed from the dainty fairy, a man as far as his body was concerned, but a grey ass's head was on his shoulders. The little sovereign now awoke, and commenced to crown the hairy head with flowers. Sweet words of love she poured into his ear, caressed him tenderly with her tiny hands, and put her arms about his ugly neck. Then a band of fairy elves came flying at her call, with nimble grace they did her least command. Laden with luscious fruit they tempted the ass to eat, purple grapes and downy peaches they offered him by

turns, while an elf, astride upon a dragon-fly, tilted with a spear of grass at a bee upon a thistle. Lily loved to watch the mimic fight. She laughed with pleasure to see the tiny people among the flowers. Never had she seen so pretty a sight before. A little elfin man in green and gold captured a gay butterfly as it fluttered past, and pulling apart its painted wings, used them to shade the sleepy ass's eyes from the silver moonbeams.

Suddenly, just as Lily was watching the fairy train with intense delight, the elves departed. The cowslips and the other blossoms hung their heads, the moon withdrew her light, the mist hid the flowers and their queen from sight, and Lily gave back the crystal into her kind friend's hand with a long-drawn sigh. It was a happy sigh of wonder and of great delight, and with a burst of childish glee she cried—

“That was Titania; and Puck is one of those dear little fairy courtiers! Father will never believe what tricks his Puck has been up to to-night!”

She was startled from her pleasant thoughts just

at this moment by a noise outside the cottage. Surely those were drums beating, and cymbals clashing, and loud shouts were being borne upon the air! What could be going on outside this quiet old-world kitchen? She looked towards the open casement, and then saw her eccentric Turkish friend, Mr. Tommy, gesticulating and beckoning her to join him. She sprang from beside the gentle poet and ran across the room, but paused upon the threshold. Was this the way to part from one who had treated her so well? She had quite forgotten to say good-bye to the kind and indulgent master of the house, and to thank him for her sight of the magic crystal. With childish grace and simplicity she retraced her steps and put her little hand in his. With a radiant face uplifted to him she told her poet friend what a happy time she had passed beneath his roof.

"Farewell, sweetheart," he smilingly returned. "Pr'ythee keep a place in thy heart and memory for poor Will Shakspeare. An' it please thee, this crystal shall be thine, in remembrance of thy visit here to-night. Keep it bright and free from soil,

and safe from the influence of less loving and less reverent hands than these same little ones."

So saying, he gave the ball into Lily's eager grasp. Before she could recover from her surprise sufficiently to tell her friend how precious the gift was to her, she was on the outer step of the grey house, the little black door was closed behind her, and she was hurried away by the energetic Turk, with long and rapid strides.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FIGIS AND THEIR CONCERT.

"They come from afar,
From a distant land,
Where the sun glows bright
On the burning sand;
From a beautiful isle
Where the palms wave free,
Fringing the shore
Of the Southern Sea."—ANON.

AS Lily ran beside her guide she tried in vain to keep up with him.

"Don't you think you might take shorter steps, Mr. Tommy? You know my legs are not very long!"

"Here, put on these again," said he; "we shall go along at double the pace then." And he produced the skates once more from his capacious pockets and buckled them on.

"I had no idea these galleries were so long," observed Lily, her cheeks glowing with the exercise as they sped quickly along; but her words were almost drowned by the noise before mentioned, which had been growing louder and louder every moment and was now perfectly deafening. Shouts and cries, and the sound of pipes, and cymbals, and loud kettledrums was quite alarming! Lily turned to her companion for an explanation of these curious sounds, and slackening his speed he paused by the edge of the gallery and told her to look below. Through the leafy screen she peeped with eager curiosity.

"There they go," cried her lively companion; "I love to see them caper and twirl on their way to the antediluvians! But their concert comes off first I think to-night. There are the night-commanders in their state carriages leading the procession. Look at them all, Miss Lily; are they not a cheerful assembly?"

Below them, Lily saw a sight which made her open her eyes in great surprise, and her breath come short and quick. Dancing along in wild

fantastic fashion, shouting as they went, were a large number of savages as black as coal ; some were of a lighter hue, but the darker shades predominated. These—and Lily thought that it showed off the ebony of their skin to greater advantage—had scarlet and orange heads of hair. Pointed beards too they wore of the same violent colour. An extraordinary concourse of people truly! The strange procession was headed by a row of bath-chairs, each containing the chief of a tribe. Very important they looked in their different adornments—"badges of office, as the great men of their country," Tommy told Lily. Huge feathers nodded over the heads of some of them, while straw hats completed the attire of others ; spears and shields of different shapes were borne by all.

"Old bath-bricks!" said Tommy, "are they not? There's no harm in them, they are good-natured old parties, all of them."

The strange carriages and their occupants passed on, pushed by a troop of young savages trained for the purpose "By order of the Bath and Wells

officers," explained Tommy ; " not being invalided they go by the name of the Wells, and they expect a great deal of attention and respect from all these darkies, I can assure you."

A very odd regiment this was indeed to Lily's fancy ! With legs and arms extended, they spun round and round with discordant cries, their hair waving behind them as they went. Some wore rows of coloured beads about their necks, and striped cloths of different colours twisted round their waists. Others of the party wore short skirts of ribbon-grass and had aigrettes in their hair. Lily liked these savages, and Tommy told her they were the belles of the tribe and were much admired by their dark cavaliers. Little brown urchins ran by their side, and smaller mummies of children were slung upon their backs. Tommy suggested with a chuckle that Bath-buns should have been provided by the commanders on ahead for these small people. What with this idea, and the comical appearance of one and all as the noisy crew went by, Lily laughed long and loudly, and this attracted the attention of one of the savage tribe

below. Stopping short in his mad career, he looked up at her and kissed his hand, grinning as he did so, and showing a row of dazzling teeth. Then he proceeded to strike a few chords on the banjo he wore slung round him, and nodding and grinning



and grinning and nodding, he sang the following song—the air Lily knew, but the words—how very odd they were!

“Just before the concert, Lily,
Listen while I sing to you
Of the darkies you are watching,
Figi men and women too!
Savage comrades round me caper,
Whirling, shouting, in their glee—
For they know that on the morrow
Stiffened ef-figies they’ll be!”

He was just commencing the chorus, "Just before the ——" with many droll gesticulations, rolling his eyes till the whites were alone visible, when Lily tightened her hold of Mr. Tommy's hand, and looked at him appealingly. Heartily did she wish she had checked her peal of laughter and that the singer had never caught sight of her. It was more than she could bear to have him there singing about her, and making those diabolical faces at her; they might amuse him, but they certainly did not please her, so she crept the closer to her protector and tried to avoid the dark stranger's dreadful eye.

"Now then, be off, move on! move on! we don't want anything of the kind here!" shouted Mr. Tommy to the gentleman below, who seemed determined to win Lily's heart by most extraordinary gestures, his tokens of regard. "Don't you see you're annoying the lady? and we've got no small change here. Now then, sir, do you hear? Go to Bath, sir—follow your troop—they've all gone on ahead. Can't you take a hint? Yah! yah! black sheep, have you any wool? It seems

to me your brains must be gathering some, not to understand you're in the way."

"But, hulloa! those who live in these sort of crystal dwellings shouldn't be throwing stones about, I s'pose," and taking off his red turban as easily as though it were a cap, the Turk passed his hand over a shining white crown as innocent of hair and quite as smooth as a billiard-ball. Replacing it, he shook his fist at the Figi, and in a loud authoritative voice called out, "Right about face—march!"

Instantly the lively savage twisted one ebony leg high above his head, then catching hold of his foot with his hand he held the limb before him as stiff as a stake, and hopped in a marvellously rapid manner after his companions, singing,

"Yah! yah! black sheep, hab you any wool?
Yes, massa, I hab one poll full!"

and all the while shaking and nodding, and rolling and twisting his unhappy head about from side to side, so that Lily feared every moment to see it roll off on to the floor. It gave her quite a headache to watch him do it, and it was with a sigh of relief that she saw him at last disappear in the distance.

"Rather a curious specimen that, eh?" observed Tommy; "I dare say he's thought quite a brilliant wit in his own circle; you ought to have heard the end of his song though, Miss Lily! He wouldn't have done you any harm. But there in the distance the concert is going on; would you rather not go to it? Hark!"

The Figis were now singing, and Lily's curiosity getting the better of her fears she pulled the Turk by the hand and whispered—

"Please, I should like to hear them sing very much, if you will keep close to me and let me hold your hand *all* the time. And please, Mr. Tommy, I shall like it so very much better if they don't sing about me or speak to me."

Promising he would let that fact be known, Tommy led her on. They sped along the galleries at a rapid pace, up one side and down the other, till they reached a flight of stairs and alighted at the foot softly and gently.

"Dear me!" said Lily, "I never jumped so many steps at a time before; and it is really quite easy after all."

She now discovered that they had reached the great organ, and what a sight met her eyes! The savages were all seated tier upon tier closely packed, and Lily felt desperately inclined to laugh. Stifling the peals that were imminent, she stole glances at them behind Mr. Tommy's satin blouse. There sat all the fat Mrs. Figis fanning themselves with their hats, evidently much exhausted with their late march, sucking away too at shaddocks and oranges and drinking deep draughts of milk from the brown cups of the cocoa-nut. Elegant Figi belles simpered and coquetted over palm-leaf fans at the sooty dandies by their side. Small boys in one corner were pushing and struggling with each other over a seat that they all wished to occupy, and a comic youth with a piece of bamboo thrust through his under-lip put his tongue in his cheek and winked with ludicrous solemnity as he pointed Lily and Tommy out to a friend of his on the same bench. Very glad was the former when she and the Turk seated themselves before the great theatre, and were thus able to turn their backs upon the audience. Squeezing Mr. Tommy's hand

tightly, partly to help her to contain the laughter which she knew was bubbling over, and partly to reassure herself, she looked towards the stage. There sat about twenty savages in a semi-circle, the only addition to their toilette since Lily had seen them being large lace collars fastened round their necks, and cuffs to match round their wrists. Each man's brown hands were placed upon his equally brown knees. Peal after peal of childish merriment burst from Lily at sight of them, it could no longer be contained. Some of the savages had twisted up their scarlet heads of hair in wonderfully grotesque fashion ; one wore it in a high peak at the top of his head, and another had pulled it out on either side of his face till he looked like a clown in a pantomime. All the while fifes, cymbals, drums, and banjos clashed, and squeaked, and twanged away, with right good will. These now ceased, and a tall youthful savage came forward to the front of the stage, and bowing to the audience amid great applause commenced the following song. He sang so clearly and distinctly that every word was audible to Lily, who listened with great delight :—

"Come where the Mammoths linger,
Come to the gardens wide,
Come where the Paleothera
And Pterodactyles hide.
There we will hunt the Moa,
The Glyptodon we'll tease,
And spear the Plesiosaurus,
Swimming about at ease.

"Come where the Mammoth's linger
And Dinotheria play,
Come when the day has faded
With Figians bright and gay.
While bright stars shine above us,
We'll rove in pleasure free,
Come, Lily, to the gardens,
To flower, shrub, and tree !"

The chorus was sung by the entire company so low and so softly that it sounded like a melodious whisper ; in fact Lily was not very sure that they were singing till Tommy suggested in her ear that a few jujubes might be beneficial as they seemed to be suffering from loss of voice. Shouts and loud clapping on the part of the enthusiastic audience testified to their delight at the song, and Lily gladly applauded the singers also. After the song was ended every one rose, the green curtain fell, and apparently the performance was over for

that evening. It certainly seemed very peculiar but none the less true. Very soon every seat was empty and the whole troop, capering as before, resumed their order of march.

"Do you see that?" said Tommy. "They soon get tired of sitting still, and now they are off to the Gardens; the poor Antediluvians they have been singing about won't have any peace of their lives to-night! They are making a general move; that's the general, look!"

There was an important-looking savage islander! Tall coloured feathers, red, blue, and yellow, waved in the air above his head as he walked; huge gold earrings were in his ears, and he now proceeded to take from under his arm a red umbrella. After solemnly shaking out its ample folds he opened it and held it over his portly form, and with the air of an emperor he marshalled his men to the Gardens.

Lily laughed till the tears rolled down her cheeks at the grotesque officer and his black regiment; she was literally obliged to wipe her streaming eyes with her little pocket-handkerchief.

"Cheep up, Miss Lily, don't let your spirits go

down! We'll soon join them in the grounds. In the mean time I wish to show you the apiary here, a Natural History curiosity," and he led her to a door as he spoke.

"Do you know, Mr. Tommy, it's very kind of you," said Lily, "but I'd very much rather not waste time by going to see either the monkeys, or the bees, or the birds,—to tell you the truth," she added shyly, "I'm not quite sure which it is you want me to see! *I* want to go out and see all the animals—the Antediluvians!"

As Lily said this she saw for the first time a large placard on the door before her, and Mr. Tommy pointed to it while she read :

ADMISSION FREE TO VIEW THE SPELLING BEE.
--

"Only take care, Miss Lily, if you go in that it doesn't settle on your bonnet, for then you might have spelling-bees on the brain ever after, which

would be extremely awkward both for yourself and friends."

Of course the announcement tempted Lily to see for herself what was to be seen, so pushing open the door she and her companion entered.

CHAPTER VII.

A SPELLING BEE AND LAWN TENNIS UNDER NEW
AUSPICES.

“How doth the little busy bee
Improve each shining hour.”

SAMUEL WATTS.

WHERE was the Bee! Among the motley crowd of little animals before her Lily could see no such insect, though on entering the room Tommy asked her if she did not hear a “hum”? A confused noise there was certainly; a great deal of conversation was apparently going on. A group of white ferrets was earnestly discussing some point of vital interest over a large dictionary which rested on a table in the centre of the room. Weasels in long great-coats stood chattering together with their hands behind them, and now and then indulging in

a laugh over some *bon mot* or other. Small gaily-dressed monkeys in hats and feathers sat gossiping with each other, evidently on very friendly terms, while a sober-looking brown mastiff with an intellectual forehead and a large pair of spectacles on his nose waited for general silence to speak. A circle of representatives of the animal kingdom surrounded him on high stools, and Lily had never seen such a number of little hares, kittens, dogs, and weasels before. They were all dressed in some costume; officers in uniforms, ladies in bonnets, students in caps, were bending forward seemingly with their attention closely riveted on Professor Mastiff, who, clearing his throat, began thus:—

“Having been requested to examine the candidates before me in their sense of spell, I, unaccustomed as I am to public speaking, have consented. To Bee or not to Bee is the question. I reply, ‘To Bee’—spell ‘jugged!’”

So sudden an inquiry threw the candidate to whom it was addressed into a great flutter, and a general commotion ensued. Tommy whispered into Lily’s ear—

"Look, that word makes every individual hare stand on end!"

It was quite true, up they got from their seats and off they scampered, timid little hares!

Severely the professor turned his glassy eyes on a weasel seated next to the stool vacated by the hare.

"Sir, will you please spell the word?"

No answer came from this candidate; dead silence ensued. The same question was put in a louder key with no better result; at last, just as the examiner in a fierce tone was about to repeat it for the third and last time, a loud and prolonged snore proceeded from the brown quadruped. A policeman, with a red bushy tail appearing under his long coat, then removed the sleeping animal.

"That's right, Foxey," cried Tommy; "you'd catch a weasel asleep if any one could! Run him in, Foxey; run him in!"

A giddy young goose was next interrupted in a flirtation with one of the German students, by being asked to spell "Michaelmas." Cackling nervously, she tried in vain to articulate; it was no use, the

letters refused to make themselves heard ; her beak opened two or three times, and as convulsively snapped-to again, without emitting the slightest sound ; then she also rose from her seat and waddled from the class.

"Visions of sage and onions and the stuffing usually indulged in at that time, came over poor goosey! Ha, ha!" chuckled Tommy. "Seasonable reflections. It seems to me these good people won't have much to do with Bees again in a hurry. They've been stung to the quick, and are in a horrid wax."

Just as Mr. Tommy was saying this, the professor in his blandest tones requested a little white kitten with a blue bow at its neck to spell him the word "Vivisection." In an instant all the room was in an uproar, and Lily and Tommy were glad to make their escape. Cries and howls, and barks and caterwauling became so loud and unpleasant to their ears that it was with a feeling of great relief that they emerged into the lovely fairy-like gardens of the wonderful Palace. Bright as day everything glittered and shone in surpassing lustre

and beauty. Emerald verdure stretched away on all sides, more brilliant than ever blade of grass appeared before. Fountains of gigantic height threw up to the starlit sky their wealth of perfumed waters. Beds of purple lavender surrounded some, while borders of the sweetest roses scented others with showers of dainty petals. Avenues of stately lime-trees intersected the grounds, which here rose in gentle hillocks, and there sank again into mossy flowery dells.

As Lily and her guide passed under the leafy aisles, she saw that the blaze of light which filled every corner of the vast pleasure-grounds was owing entirely to the lemon-coloured blossoms which hung in rich abundance from every branch. Not only was the scent which they possessed of overpowering sweetness, but rays of light, brighter and purer than those of any ordinary lamp, radiated from them and cast a strange resplendence on all around.

"Oh, Mr. Tommy!" cried Lily, enthusiastically, "how gorgeous your satin dress is! I never saw it properly before. Do you know, the colour of your

turban and trousers is perfectly lovely; I can hardly look at them, they dazzle me so," and she put up her little hand to shade her eyes from the unnatural brilliancy of his gay dress.

"I am glad I look well in the lime-light, Miss Lily," said he, laughing, and making her a profound bow the while. "It is not everybody who can stand it, you know; it shows up one's defects so;" and he twirled the waxed ends of his moustache with conscious pride. As they walked on they reached sparkling water-courses in marble basins, and here were many savages racing one another and spinning about in eccentric fashion in long narrow canoes; a paddle in one hand, and a spear brandished in the other. One canoe came flying down an incline of water at a very rapid pace.

"That's a South Sea Islander, bent on sport," observed Tommy. "He's shooting the rapids, and I'll back him to teach the young idea how to shoot. There, they are making quite a South Sea Bubble." He pointed to where one canoe after another came tumbling down the incline, upside-down, higgledy-

piggledy, pell mell—every way but the right one. Black heads and arms flourished in all directions, and Lily anxiously appealed to the Turk to know “whether the Plesio-plesio—something they sang about at the concert—would gobble the poor little Figis up.”

They left the little sportsmen struggling in the water, and next found themselves in a large open space covered with closely-shaven turf. A low net was stretched across the centre of it, and a party of savages were here assembled, busy playing what looked to Lily like the game of lawn tennis. But the ball—how elastic it was! It hardly touched the ground when up it was again and over the net before the players had time to strike it. One of the players caught the big ball in his arms while Lily was watching the game. Instantly there rose the cry from all, “Caught out!” and the elastic piece of rotundity unrolled itself; a black head was uplifted, two brown arms were unpacked from the sides, the ex-ball threw two somersaults backwards in the air and ran off the ground on a pair of very sturdy brown legs. With a bow, which consisted

of his hand being placed behind his head and forcing it forward, another specimen of heathendom proceeded to pack himself up ; and in a second, to



Lily's extreme amusement, another large brown tennis-ball rolled itself along the ground.

"Affectionate race, that!" said Mr. Tommy, as loud cries of "Love one—no, love all!" were borne upon the air.

"Oh, that's all in the rules of the game," said Lily. "I know that part ; but it puzzles me rather, the way they play tennis here. I suppose though they have their own rules, you know, and they are sure to be peculiar!"

"To be sure, Miss Lily; these are the very game-laws you know there has been such a fuss about lately. The owners of the property here don't like to have these wild boys of the woods—these hare-ums scare-ums—shot about the place like this; and nets spread too for the game! Perhaps they are right; and then again perhaps they are wrong. They might at any rate have put up a notice, 'No rubbish to be shot here.'"

Lily was still watching the little indiarubber boy, flying like a shuttlecock between the players, when she found Mr. Tommy had moved on; so with her eyes still glued to the tennis court she walked reluctantly after him. A rustic bridge led them to the silvery lake whose calm waters reflected the bright light of the moon above. Here syringa grew in profusion, and Lily picked large bunches as she passed, and buried her little face in the pure white scented blossoms. Antediluvian beasts were here in large numbers, and huge woolly monsters tried in vain to escape from their yelling, shouting tormentors, who with drums and discordant shouts drove them almost to despair. Peals of fiendish

merriment burst from the savages as they capered round their prisoners.

"Poor beasts!" thought Lily; "they were not having a good time of it."

But they flapped their huge ears in lazy fashion and bore their persecutions most patiently. Some swam about more at their ease in the water, and these seemed really to enjoy their night's liberty. A wonderful set they were! Lily was glad the savages' song at the concert had prepared her for seeing these marvels of the ancient world!

"Just look at that old fellow!" said Mr. Tommy; "he looks very much up a tree, doesn't he? Why on earth doesn't the old idiot come down and enjoy himself, instead of remaining stuck up so high and mighty there! He's up on his hind legs, and won't come off the high horse-chestnut there. Well, every one has his hobby, they say, and that horse-chestnut is his! I call it carrying off things with a very high paw, don't you? He's an ambitious old beast, and wants to get to the top of the tree."

Certainly it did not seem a comfortable position for the huge beast to remain in. There he was

with his front paws raised against a lofty tree, and Lily wondered at his odd fancy, as she looked. She thanked Mr. Tommy for his kind explanation. He was a wonderful man! He knew all about everybody and everything in the whole place. Out of breath with a long run which she and her guide then indulged in, Lily came to a standstill before a merry-go-round, which whirled round faster and faster as she watched it. She quite forgot to look whether her companion in the race had come in first or second, whether he was at the goal or far behind; she was too intent on the revolutions of the mimic coursers before her. A fiery steed came first, of a brilliant red with black spots of startling size; he was ridden by an infant savage, who, with his arms crossed upon his breast, stood fearlessly upon the bare-back of the high-couraged steed. With arching neck and foaming bit, this one passed by. A triumphal car with three milk-white steeds came next, with scarlet nostrils and staring glassy eyes. Three noble beasts! A baby chief held the reins gathered in one hand, while in the other he brandished aloft a tiny spear.

"I like that yellow chariot best," said Lily; "with those splendid coal-black horses! I should like to be Boadicea, and fancy I was leading on my men to battle in that great car! Oh, dear, can't I have a ride too? Do you know, Mr. Tommy, I think it is rather stupid to look on and not have some fun too! I daren't go nearer to those dreadful boys—they make such a noise as they fly round—but I should like to have a ride so much!" and she turned her bright face to her guide.

"Follow me, come from earth away!" sang Mr. Tommy. "Beautiful—beautiful—beautiful Moa!"

Was Mr. Tommy mad?—or what did he mean? He merely murmured these words over and over to himself, and beckoned Lily to follow him in, a tragic attitude. It was no use to ask him what he meant, he only beckoned, and so Lily patiently followed, knowing that she would soon see for herself what new thing her eccentric friend was after. He soon turned off from the greensward into a large paved court, where Lily of course followed him, and there stood the strangest vehicle she had ever seen. Scarlet in colour—the immense spider-like wheels

formed the greater part of the whole carriage. A small seat, large enough for two, was suspended between the wheels, with a gold crown painted upon the back. If the carriage was a peculiar one, how much more peculiar was the bird harnessed to it! Like an ostrich, yet so much bigger. Was ever carriage harnessed before to so odd-looking a steed!

"Though he's a queer one to look at, he's a good one to go," volunteered Mr. Tommy. "He's a specimen of the Moa—a bird of ancient parentage. He's the last of his race—no doubt if he could speak he would say, with feeling, 'The more the merrier!' Would you care to take a trip with the Highflier to the clouds, or would you rather stay on Mother Earth? Please yourself, Miss Lily, and you'll please me—only make up your mind quickly, as he starts on his aerial journey almost immediately."

Such a proposal was warmly received by Lily; there was nothing she would like better.

"Who is the coachman though? Won't you come too?" she asked somewhat anxiously.

The Turk put his hand to his heart and bowed low.

"Your humble servant will conduct you, and the old bird knows his road well ; see, he understands me, don't you, my cock ?" and he stroked the curious grey feathers on its long thin neck.

Then the Moa opened one of its queer yellow eyes very wide, and slowly closed the other !

"Wink, ah, wink ! you ancient dick,
How we wish we knew the trick,
Far above the earth to fly,
Like an ostrich in the sky !"

observed Tommy, with a laugh, and proceeded to lift Lily on to the cosy little black satin seat of the carriage. "How do you like my poems for infant minds, Miss Lily ? Don't you think I might be made Poet Laureate of the Turkies !—eh ?"

He took his place beside her, and rested his yellow slipper comfortably on the footboard before them. Lily's little legs could not nearly reach it ; but she was very comfortable notwithstanding, and she nodded her curly head cheerfully when her companion asked her if she were ready to start.

The docile Moa raised its heavy wings in obedience to its master's cry of "All right, old bird!" and softly and imperceptibly they rose from off the ground.

"Isn't it very difficult to drive a horse—I mean bird—straight up into the air?" asked Lily, inquiringly.

"Oh, no, not a bit," answered Tommy. "He'd take the air blindfold—there's only one thoroughfare—the Milky Way, as it is called—lying there before us," and he indicated with his whip what looked like a broad white road in the dark-blue ether. Touching the Moa lightly with the lash, they flew up still quicker though the night air.

"Oh, it's delightful!" said Lily, drawing a deep breath, and tightening her hold of the arm of the seat, as the great bird drew them up as quick as thought—up from the green grass and trees below, up into the moonlit clouds above. "Are we going anywhere particular, or are we only out for a drive?" asked Lily, presently.

Holding his cigarette between his fingers, and

blowing a cloud of Latakia through his nose, Tommy smilingly replied—

“It is right that you should know that you are now driving in Queen Mab's post-cart—the Royal Mail.”

“Queen Mab!” cried Lily in tones of astonishment; “has *she* anything to do with us?”

“Rather!” replied her conductor. “Didn't you know that the Palace down there is hers? Though we are all under an adverse spell most of the year, to-night the entire Palace is in her hands, and Her Gracious Majesty allows us an evening out. So now you know all about it!”

“Oh, how I wish you could always do as you like, Mr. Tommy; it is the very nicest palace I have ever seen!” and Lily clapped her hands in delight.

“Yes, it's a regular red-letter night,” continued Tommy, “and this post-cart takes all the red-letters from the red-letter-box, down in the middle of the Palace to all the people up here.”

“Red-letters!—people!” Lily was getting confused with the new turn things were taking, and looked appealingly at her guide.

"Don't you understand—eh? Well it's a grand night, that's all, and all the letters that arrive at the Palace are red."

"And what happens at other times, Mr. Tommy?"

"Oh, they are not red, that's all, and they find their way to the waste-paper basket."

"Oh, thank you so much! I am so glad to know all about it!" said Lily. "And now tell me about the mail-cart. You don't mean to say that *people* live up here?"

"Of course they do," answered her guide. "Did you never hear of people being up in the clouds? Well, they come up here, and they visit their lovely aerial dwellings. Every man and woman is his or her own architect; you would be astonished to see the variety and style of these castles that they build. This is their retreat from the cares of business, and from the worries of daily life. They like coming up here so much that they find it difficult to tear themselves away, and return again to practical life. The change of air does them good, you know; it's a purer, fresher atmosphere in this

latitude than what they get down there in the smoky and dusty city."

"Will you take me to some of these cloudland castles, Mr. Tommy? I *should* so much like to go!"

"Of course you would," was the Turk's retort; "I knew that, and we are on our way to them now."

"Hurrah!" thought Lily.

CHAPTER VIII.

A FLYING VISIT TO SOME CASTLES IN THE AIR.

“With fairy euphrasy they purged mine eyes,
To let me see their cities in the skies.
'Twas they first school'd my young imagination
To take its flight like any new-fledged bird,
And showed the span of wingèd meditation,
Stretch'd wider than things grossly seen or heard.
With sweet, swift Ariel how I soar'd and stirr'd
The fragrant blooms of spiritual bowers !”

HOOD, *Midsummer Fairies*.

THEY spun quickly along the now level road ; a curious road, so soft—no stones, no ruts—as smooth as smooth could be. They seemed to be flying rather than driving, and yet the great wheels revolved and the Moa's long legs stepped out, so Lily knew they were really driving. They had cantered up the road before ; but now that the uphill part of the journey was over, it seemed just like trotting as quick as thought over cotton-

wool or eider-down. Nothing was to be seen below but a misty blue expanse, through which glimmered subdued moonlight. As they drove along a clear strain of melody thrilled through the night air, like the sweetest of nightingale's songs.

"Is that a bird?" said Lily. "I almost fancied, do you know, Mr. Tommy, that I heard words! There, I am sure of it!" And, as she spoke, the following verse was wafted to them on some soft zephyr:—

"Where the clouds are, there am I;
In fair Lily's wake on high:
Where I sing and welcome cry,
On Pterodactyl back I fly
After Lily merrily:
Merrily, merrily, shall I sing loud,
Up in the region of moonbeam and cloud."

"Why, there's some one else singing about me!" said Lily. "How odd it is! Do they know me here, up in the air, as well as down in the Enchanted Palace? 'In fair Lily's wake I fly!'" And the grey eyes, with a troubled, puzzled look, glanced eagerly round for the singer. Just at that moment something flew past her, and alighted a few paces from the carriage. Why, it was one of

the extraordinary monsters, half-bird half-beast, she had seen in the garden below! What a face the creature had! It looked old—very old—to judge by its puckers and its wrinkles. One finger of each hand was attached to its black and skinny wing; a weird natural history curiosity certainly! Again the same silvery voice struck upon her ear—surely this ancient Pterodactyl could not own such liquid tones? Ah, no! as it dropped its flapping wings, Lily saw that a glittering form bestrode it; a flood of brilliant light illuminated the dainty rider, and his bright locks floated round him in the night air, a fitting framework for the gay *débonnaire* countenance turned towards her. His head was uncovered, for with courtly air he had doffed his cap, which he held in his hand. Softly tinted wings of gauzy texture grew between his shoulders, over one of which hung a cloak of golden gossamer; he was in all respects a winning little cavalier, and of such fairy proportions and airy grace, that, as she looked, Lily almost feared she would see him float away like thistledown before the breeze.

"Come and be introduced, my delicate Ariel!" and Tommy waved his hand, as he presented the gallant rider to the little maid.

"We have hardly need of such introduction, fair Lily-bud, have we?"

How melodious his voice was! it sounded to Lily's ears like marvellous sweet music. She loved to hear him speak.

"Thou'rt here to visit some of the cloud-capp'd towers? Wilt have me for thy guide? I am Her Majesty's flying pursuivant throughout the realms of air, and will lead thee where thou wilt!"

Accepting Ariel's offer gladly, Lily turned to see what Tommy thought of the arrangement, and found he was curled up in his corner almost asleep; he murmured—"that she was to take the reins"—and in a second more he was snoring loudly! Away they went then along the white roads, and with her pretty guide riding by her side Lily felt quite safe; the Moa arched his long neck proudly the while, and seemed to like its new driver. On either side of the road rose tall misty trees, growing more thickly together as the carriage went

further on ; and now Lily perceived that she was driving on the outskirts of a pine-wood. Indistinctly and dimly the trees reared their tall heads above the drifts of white cloud that swept by them, and mysteriously they waved their branches in the air. At a sign from the glittering rider, the "Highflier" stopped before a small white gate ; and Ariel, bending towards Lily, pointed to a cottage before them, in the depths of the pine-wood. A humble cottage ; but, oh, such a pretty one ! Clusters of pink roses clambered up the porch and round the windows ; ivy and clematis clothed the walls ; lavender, wallflowers, and pinks, blue larkspurs, daphnes and sweetwilliams, lilies and sweetpeas, bloomed together in rich profusion. Was there ever such a garden ? Spring flowers and summer ones—a paradise of scent and colour. A black-bird whistled in a wicker cage that hung beside the door, and drowsy brown velvet bees gathered golden syrup from the hearts of the flowers as they hummed and buzzed about. There stood the yellow hive in the sweetest corner of all, and Lily clapped her hands as she asked—

"Who lives in that dear little country home?"

"An' it please thee, a crippled youth," answered Ariel, a shade passing over his sunny face, "one who passeth most of the hours of his life on earth in lone poverty, dwelling in a darksome alley i' the heart of a busy city; the blessed sunshine rarely kisseth his wasted cheek, nor e'en do flowers, Dame Nature's gift to poor and rich alike, e'er greet his weary eyes, save, and this truly is the one bright star that shineth in a night of gloom, save when his sweetheart comes i' the way with a posy for the lad, a kind wench, who hardly earns the money wherewith to live. Discoursing with one another in simple fashion, his pain is eased the while, and his heart is cheered, her homely tones are as music to his ear, her smile like brightest sunlight. This cottage here furnishes them with pleasant matter for their talk. And while they plan this garden i' the clouds, and the sweet homestead where they fain would dwell, the wonted paleness of his face assumes a rosier hue, and his dull eyes glisten withal; and these mine humble workers in the

midst of want and sickness are content. Dost like my tale of the cottage in a wood ?”

“ Oh, yes ! and I am so glad they come up here sometimes,” said Lily. “ How they must love to smell these beautiful flowers ! ”

“ Thou say’st well, sweet Lily-bud ; oft doth Queen Mab, the friend of the suffering and th’ oppressed on earth, waft them hither in a fairy chariot o’ the skies ! But now, so please you, we must fly to other castles which await our coming.”

Lily, seeing her new friend urging on his steed, accordingly said—

“ Please, Moa, follow Ariel,” and instantly they were rolling along once more on their noiseless journey. “ No wood-pavement ever was so soundless,” thought Lily.

Very different was the next building which rose before them, surrounded by stately avenues of Spanish chestnuts and orange-groves, the golden fruit of the latter hanging in abundance among the glossy leaves and white perfumed flowers. Oleanders of a deep rich colour stood in large green tubs

upon a marble terrace bathed in moonlight ; and fountains in the grounds shot up their sparkling waters far above the trim yews that skirted the noble domain.

“ Why that house is all of marble ! ” said Lily, in an awe-struck voice. “ How white it shines in the moonlight ! Are those bright awnings down to keep out the glare of a very hot sun ? Do tell me a nice story about that castle, Ariel—will you, please ? I want to know who lives there.”

“ One whose father’s father owned both fair lands and titles in the past ; but there came a time of terror upon the sunny land that gave her birth, and the blood of nobles, aye, and of many commons too, was poured forth. ’Twas then, bereft of fortune and kindred, that she did seek shelter and found it on our isle. Since then she hath succoured those in like case—homeless, they look to her for help—and she hath raised this dwelling for their sakes. Here are fair lawns, where aged folk may bask i’ the sun, and wide terraces, for those of tender years to sport among the orange-trees and limes, safe from the storms and shipwrecks that too

often vex'd them in days of yore. Poor in this world's riches, she doth own this lovely *château en Espagne*, which kings might justly envy.

"What a dear old lady!" cried Lily. "I wonder what sort of castle I should build if I were given the chance? I should like to build an Enchanted Palace, and have you and Queen Mab, and the little grey house, and the kind master, whenever I wanted you. But, Ariel, see! there's another castle! and I do believe it's the very best one of them all!"

They were driving on as she spoke, and high grey rocks had now appeared on either hand; and, lo! before them rose an ancient fortress, whose base was washed by a silver sea. The blue mist which had hung over it like a curtain, rolled gently away, and the moon shone gloriously upon a castle fit for King Arthur and his gallant knights. A high wall and moat encircled it, spanned by a draw-bridge, the battlements were massive, and its towers hidden among the clouds. It was the very picture of a stronghold of the olden time.

"Thine uncle doth know somewhat of the painter-

poet who raised that hoary pile, fair Lily-bud," said Ariel, smiling. "'Twere better that he should tell thee of it. Natheless, I'll do my best. Within that ancient pile are halls paved with rare marbles, and stuffs of Tyrian dye, hangings inwrought with tales of old, and trees of every clime, and wond'rous peacocks with an hundred eyes. Goodly youths and beauteous maidens pass away their time with music and the dance, thronging the castle—aye, till the old walls ring again with strains of softest melody—and, so it please thee, with shrillest laughter too, as gold-shod feet do move with swift-ness hither and thither. The sweetest breezes scent th' entire air, and youthful forms, with glistening eyes and circlets of roses o'er their brows, join i' the games of grace and skill. They throw the silken ball from hand to hand, and the fair maidens love to strive 'gainst each other in the race. Fleet o' foot, their sandals but lightly press the daisied mead, and trimly about their dainty limbs their clinging perfumed gowns are safely girt withal. An idle, but a most pleasant castle. Soft—dost see the archway there? The youths and damsels

wander thither beneath the grey-leaved apple trees, the almond and the trellised rose ; March violets, and yellow daffodils, stud the emerald sward, and pink-footed turtle-doves circle above them i' the air, and coo the while, as the milk-white blossoms of the hawthorn fall upon their golden heads. Knights with grave eyes, and hair of ruddy gold, lead them to the pleasance, and the pale moon sheds forth her silver beams and bathes them in the light of long ago."

"I like that castle very much," said Lily ; "but do tell me something about its owner. Did you say that Uncle Frank knew him—really?"

"Aye, verily," returned Ariel. "'Tis called—and well 'tis so named—'The Palace of Art,' and built by one who dwells here certainly ; goes he away to earth, he's back or ere he's missed. His friends oft find him absent, and when they fain would have him sociable—he's i' the clouds ! There's a magic weed that brings men hither, from it in airy circles doth mount a vapour when 'tis alight, and as a charm it subtly works and brings them up."

"How wonderful !" said Lily. "It is so kind of you, Ariel, to tell me all about it."

"Pr'ythee, dost know the birds of a strong wing—'Ambition' and 'Hope'? While life doth last, the latter bird will ever gently mount to cloudland. The former is somewhat the more adventurous of the two, and should the road hither be block'd, he'd vault the barrier; let the way be foul or fair, he'd reach his goal without delay. But now, fair Lily-bud, my pleasant task is over—the hour advances. See, the dawn breaks. Farewell—I must away!" Turning to Tommy, he then said in his ear—

"While you here do snoring lie,
Morning breaks across the sky :
Warning take—
If of life you keep a care,
Shake off slumber and beware :
Awake ! awake."

He bowed low to Lily, and kissed his tiny hand; then urging on his Pterodactyl to its greatest speed, he vanished from view, the sweet tones of his former song again sounding through the moonlit space—

"Merrily, merrily, will I sing loud,
Up in the region of moonbeam and cloud."

Tommy started up, winking his eyes, quite in a fright at having been awoke so suddenly.

"Where's the airified youngster off to?" he asked, looking about him from side to side.

"Gone," said Lily, laughing.

"Vanished into air?—into thin air? Ah, well, what can you expect!—but, halloa! where's our old cock going to?" and Lily saw with surprise that the Moa was trotting along, evidently on its own responsibility, down hill as fast as ever its long legs could carry it.

"Dear me! I believe it's in the right after all, and it's on its way home; many people don't know they're on the down-hill road till it's too late, Miss Lily—happily that's not our case," and gathering up the reins, he urged his steed on quicker and quicker. They flew along faster still, till Lily grew quite nervous, and held her little hat on with one hand, for fear that the sharp breeze might sweep it off and away, nobody knew where!

"It's all very well," said Tommy, "but if I'm not in my place by the time our revels are over, I

shall incur Her Majesty's most righteous wrath. So, 'gee-up,' Moa, it's very late indeed, and I may get very automatic indeed in a few moments."

He buttoned up his satin coat about his neck as he spoke, and still faster they flew down the steep milky-way. Gradually out of the darkness below rose the tower of the Enchanted Palace, and the glass roofs shone like thousands of diamonds in the moonbeams.

"Mr. Tommy!" now cried Lily, in a perfect agony of terror, "*do* you know that we are going straight into the lake, and we shall be 'drowned! Hasn't the horse—I mean the bird——"

"Never mind—call it the fowl of the air!" returned Tommy, coolly, as he flipped the biped in question with his whip.

"Well, Mr. Tommy, hasn't it lost its way? Oh! what shall we do?"

"Nothing of the kind, Miss Lily; nor have I lost my head," and as he spoke, softly they alighted upon the rippling surface of the lake, their strange conveyance gliding onward like a boat just loosed from its stays. "See, our carriage is admirably

suited to the water," and her companion pointed to where the water foamed and splashed about the rapidly revolving large red wheels. Capital paddles they certainly made. Lily had recovered from her fright, and now enjoyed her aquatic drive exceedingly. On through the sparkling green depths they went, and she drew her hand through the cool water, as she leaned over the side of their odd red boat. The Moa arched its long neck proudly the while, and drew them on through beds of white water-lilies, looking so pure and sweet in the bright moonlight; on they went, past the blue forget-me-nots, nodding away with their pretty blue eyes staring at her between their tall neighbours the brown bulrushes, who, Lily thought, looked like sentinels on guard over the little flowers by their side; through the silver waters of the lake they glided, till a sharp cry rang out, breaking the peaceful silence—

"Mr. Tommy! Oh, Mr. Tommy!" and Lily sprang to her feet, holding on to the boat for safety. "The rocks! — the boat! — the rocks, oh, Mr. Tommy!"

"Well, Miss Lily,

What can the matter be?
Nothing is wrong, I declare!

Boats usually do rock, particularly when anybody jumps up and down like you are doing. I advise you to sit down, you are making me feel quite sea-sick."

Here was Mr. Tommy actually beginning to sing, and to make fun, when—

"Oh, dear!—oh, dear! We are on them now, and it is too late!" as Lily called this out in an agonised voice—crash! crash! went the boat, or the carriage, or the post-cart, whatever you like to call it—bang against a huge red sandstone rock just ahead.

* * * * *

CHAPTER IX.

THE LITTLE BIRD SAFE HOME AT LAST.

"Like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temple, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherits shall dissolve ;
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made of, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep."

SHAKSPEARE, *The Tempest*.

"LILY, darling! Lily! Don't you hear me?"

Whose voice now broke upon her ear? A big moustache was next laid against her cheek, and Lily murmured, with her eyes still half-closed—

"Am I drowned? Mr. Tommy! Where's Mr. Tommy?"

"Tommy must certainly make room for your uncle, Lily dear, in this case," and a handsome

young face bent over her as she opened her grey eyes dreamily. "Why come, wake up, child! you are still dreaming. Don't you know me? Nurse is in a frenzy about you and tea is waiting for you at home. What do you mean by lying asleep



here, eh?" and the young man shook the sleepy child gently as he spoke.

"Uncle Frank! Is it really you? Where am I? What are you doing here? Is it morning?' And Lily, wide awake now, sat staring about her in surprise.

"Ha! ha!—that is good!—morning? no; and fancy asking what *I* am doing here; allow me to return the compliment, and ask you what has brought *you* straying here, frightening us all out of our wits?

"I am here to look for you, Miss Puck; so come, on with your hat, and let us get home as fast as we can."

Still in a sort of dream, Lily mechanically obeyed, and walked beside her uncle with her little hand tightly clasped in his. Rubbing away at her sleepy eyes, she looked up and down the vast nave as she hurried through it; what could it all mean? It was still broad daylight, and everything looked just as it had done before she went to sleep under the palms. Her uncle caught the puzzled look in the sweet face uplifted to his, and burst into a merry laugh.

"Now I have got you safe, little bird, I can afford to laugh. Are you really awake now, do you think? I expect the town-crier is after you, calling out—'Lost, a Little Girl!' You're a nice pickle!"

As they left the Palace, the big man with the gold-laced hat nodded and said—

“Yes, that’s the little lady as came in here alone four good hours ago.”

Was it only *four hours* since she had passed through that entrance into the Palace? What ages ago it seemed! And as Lily thought over all she had seen and done since then, she felt very much inclined to cry.

“Was it then really only a dream, her nice time in the Palace? What had become of all her friends? Had she never met them at all?”

As she asked herself these questions, the truth forced itself upon her, and she felt so unhappy, that she could neither smile nor talk, but only walked very gravely indeed along the road by the side of her uncle. He glanced smilingly down at the sober little face.

“Cheer up, little one! happily father and mother have not yet returned from town, so they have not been unnecessarily alarmed by your absence; there’s only nurse at home, and I’ll settle her; don’t you worry yourself about that,” and he clenched his hand, and looked very fierce, fearing that the thought of the scolding in store for her at

home was clouding the little brow. "Have you had a good time all by yourself in there, eh?"

A bright smile passed over Lily's face, closely followed by a stifled sob, "Oh, Uncle Frank, it's all a dream! and I want my crystal and my sprig of rosemary—I do want it so very much—and I'll never see Tommy any more! Oh, I wish—I wish——"

Here Lily's piteous exclamations were put an end to by their arriving at the garden-gate of her home, to her uncle's inexpressible relief; for her incoherent speech made it very difficult for him to know how best to comfort the distressed little maid.

Nurse met them in the path, and was too pleased to get the little truant safe home at last to think of scolding her then; indeed she sobbed her welcome over the child, and kissed her over and over again as she drew her into the house. Uncle Frank followed them and told his tale to Lily: how he had come to keep her company as she was alone, and how he had found the house in a state of consternation and distress over the young mistress's

absence. Nurse had waited dinner till half-past two, thinking that Lily would of course appear then; but three o'clock sounded and no Lily came, so putting on her bonnet, she ran, first here and then there, up one road and down another, vainly seeking traces of the lost child. Just after Frank's arrival, old Davis the postman passed by, and seeing nurse in tears before the door, touched his hat with his whip, saying, "Beg pardon, Marm, but have you lost the little missy? I see'd her up against the Palace yonder, three hours and more agone." Frank lost no time then in going in search of his daring little niece, having obtained that clue to her whereabouts.

The capture of the little fledgeling and its return home has already been told. What a marvellous tale Lily had to tell her uncle and little Archie of all her adventures since she left the Beeches! Beginning with the basket-maker's coach, and ending with the sudden collapse of the Royal Mail cart on the rocks.

"Why, Lil, darling, Queen Mab has been whispering to you, as you lay curled up under the shade

of the ferns. I never knew before that Her Majesty went about by daylight. You remember what the poet says about her, eh?—

‘The little fairy comes at night,
Her eyes are blue, her hair is brown,
With silver spots upon her wings,
And from the moon she flutters down.

‘She has a little silver wand,
And when a good child goes to bed,
She waves her wand from right to left,
And makes a circle round its head.

‘And then it dreams of pleasant things,
Of fountains filled with fairy fish,
And trees that bear delicious fruit,
And bow their branches at a wish :

‘Of harbours filled with dainty scents
From lovely flowers that never fade :
Bright flies that glitter in the sun,
And glow-worms shining in the shade.’

You see she must have paid you a visit in the Palace. I say, I must really pay that automaton chess-player of yours a morning call some day, and thank him for his attention to you. I think he’s a splendid fellow! Alas! I am afraid I shall not find the master of the grey house at home if I go there!” and Frank put on a comical smile, as he stroked Lily’s curly head. “But I’ll tell you

what we'll do, we'll go and see one of his plays some day soon at the Lyceum Theatre, and you shall see whether our great actor, Mr. Henry Irving, is anything like the player Shakspeare showed you in the ball."

Lily's golden head was full of happy thoughts when she laid it on her pillow that night; memories of the past, and bright hopes for the future, mingling together, till she fell peacefully asleep. Her mother, who returned only by a later train, kissed her little daughter as she lay in her white bed; and then talked of her wonderful dream with Frank and her husband, as they sat outside enjoying the soft scent-laden air of the June night.

"Some dreams we have are nothing else but dreams—
Unnatural and full of contradictions;
Yet others, of our most romantic schemes,
Are sometimes more than fictions,"

quoted the young painter, as he knocked off the ash from the end of his cigar. "You see, Gertrude, the child has still got the crystal ball, though she cries at the loss of it; and she'll find out the existence of her gift—imagination—before long. It seems to me a great many people possess that

magic crystal, and neglect it shamefully, not knowing that the ball, like many another thing, loses its power from disuse. Why, look at some folk, don't they let their crystal grow soiled and stained? and when they look for pictures, what do they see?—nothing but ugly and distorted visions for their pains. And others?—how can I describe their happiness in words? Many wands are waved for them, but none bears more magic in its touch than the pen of William Shakspeare. And the little one there, young as she is, has found that out!”

“What nonsense you do talk, Frank,” said Mrs. Nevil, smiling. “Between you and her father that child will be completely spoilt, and her head turned with romantic folly. I am already beginning to repent of my promise to you, not to punish her for her naughtiness in leaving home to-day. Those dreadful gipsies might have stolen her, and I might never have seen my darling again. It's too dreadful to think of! You encourage her in all her pranks, and talk to her just as if she could understand all your curious notions about things; do remember she's but a child!”

"Yes, I'll remember!" laughed Frank. "But I've been moralising quite long enough for one evening. So, good-night, dear sis—and mind you keep your promise!"

Thus came to an end a most eventful day in Lily's life; and she says she never means to forget her adventures in Queen Mab's Enchanted Palace as long as she lives. I know that she still hopes she will see her little friend Nancy again, and that she will be able to get her away some day from the "very disagreeablest person" she ever saw! Whether she ever does so or not, time must show!

THE END.

L'ENVOI.

TO those little ones who know and love the Palace of Lily's dreams, the preceding story requires no explanation ; they can follow her through its different parts with eager pleasure, recalling their many happy visits there, visits which as yet have not proved as exciting as Lily's—but, who knows?—may be so in the future. Those who have not seen Sir Joseph Paxton's monster building will wonder possibly how much is actual fact in connection with the Palace, and how much in Lily's excursion was the result of the workings of an excited little brain in sleep ! I have tried to give a faithful picture of the old Palace as Lily saw it on her first entrance. Toys are sold in abundance on either side of the wide nave. The rink of polished boards ; the screen containing the statues of the kings and

queens of England are all to be seen in reality. A full-size model of Shakspeare's house stands in one of the galleries, suggesting to the mind the thought of the gentle poet and his strong-minded wife, who dwelt three hundred years ago in a quiet street in the old town of Stratford-on-Avon. The Turk, I regret to say, has taken his departure from Sydenham—banished probably on account of some breach of etiquette on the night of his holiday—and is now at the Royal Aquarium, Westminster, where he preserves a dignified silence, no persuasions inducing him to disclose any of his pranks with Lily on a certain night in June. The Wurtenburg Collection of stuffed animals is on view, having returned once more to quiet life after the Spelling Bee. Figures of wild savages startle strangers by their grim aspect, and stand in different attitudes, more or less warlike, among ferns and palms. I have never heard of their appearing in the gardens, where huge models of antediluvian beasts hold undisputed sway, and where students have ample opportunity of studying the creation of earlier ages, the rocks around showing correctly the earth's

strata in consecutive succession. One huge mammoth clasps a tree with its fore-paws, thereby impressing every one with its gigantic size. Swings and merry-go-rounds induce cheerfully-disposed people to amuse themselves in one portion of the grounds ; but as yet I have never heard of any adventurous person, besides Lily, discovering Queen Mab's post-cart, and paying a visit to the clouds. Possibly old Davis, and his scarlet mail-cart, had more to do with this portion of the night's adventure than any one else. I can only say in conclusion, that I hope those who have never seen the wonders and beauties of the old Palace, may, like Lily, have their dream realised some day—with as much pleasure to themselves, if not with as much anxiety to their relations and friends, as that young lady's visit involved.





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